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LECTURES

ON SOME OF THE

SCRIPTURE PARABLES.

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BY

A COUNTRY PASTOR,

AUTHOR OF

'SCRIPTURE REVELATIONS RESPECTING A FUTURE STATE.'

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TO

THE PARISHIONERS OF HALESWORTH

THESE LECTURES,

THE CHIEF PART OF WHICH WERE ORIGINALLY

COMPOSED FOR THEIR USE,

ARE INSCRIBED,

WITH FERVENT PRAYERS FOR THEIR PRESENT AND

ETERNAL WELFARE,

BY THEIR SINCERE FRIEND,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE Parables here treated of are, of course, but a few out of the great number that are to be found in Scripture. They were selected either as needing some explanation, or as affording a suitable occasion for some remarks that may be useful, on Parables generally.

These discourses were, most of them, delivered, some years ago, to a country congregation. And I endeavoured accordingly to make them plain, simple, and practical, avoiding all abstruse disquisitions suited only for the learned few.

It is for this reason that I published these and the former volumes of Lectures under the designation of "A Country Pastor;" in order to avoid any such misapprehension of their character as might deter some readers, and disappoint others.

I have only to add that the Lectures in this volume do not constitute (like those in the former volumes) a regular *Series*. Any one of them may be read and understood without reference to the rest. But the one which is placed at the beginning, contains some general remarks that are applicable to each of the others.

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LECTURES

ON SOME OF

THE SCRIPTURE PARABLES.

LECTURE I.

The Parable of the Sower.

BEFORE entering on the consideration of this particular Parable, it will be advisable to say a few words on Parables in general, and our Lord's employment of them.

By a Parable,—Apologue, or Fable,—we generally understand a narrative, either fictitious, or real, designed to convey to us, by way of representation, some truth distinct from the very story itself that is told, but having an analogy or correspondence with it, or, as we sometimes say, *answering* to it. It makes no difference whether the Tale related be something that literally happened or not. In some cases it is avowedly and evidently a fiction. In this Parable of the Sower again, and in many others, what

is described is a thing of actual daily occurrence. But in all cases, whatever is understood to be a Parable, we consider as meant to convey some lesson of which the narrative itself supplies a kind of picture.

In several, however, of what are called "Parables" in Scripture, there is no distinct *narrative*, but merely an allusion to some transaction that commonly takes place, or that may be easily imagined. For instance, we read that our Lord "spoke a Parable, saying, Can the blind lead the blind?" &c. And again, "What king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first?" &c. But in these cases, just as in the others, there is a *representation* of one thing by another. So also what our Lord says about those who took the highest seats at a feast, is called a Parable, because He makes this a representation of self-exaltation, and of modesty, in all cases.*

* Some persons have, very rashly, applied the title of "Parable" to portions of Scripture which were understood, and evidently meant to be understood, as neither more nor less than literally true narratives of real events, but which these persons will not so believe. But this is an unwarrantable use of language. Any tale which is *not*

The lessons thus given are brought before the mind in a familiar, clear, and forcible manner. And accordingly Fables (which is only another name for Parables) have always been much in use for the instruction of children. But, in many cases, instruction of this kind,—namely, by some sort of comparison,—is the *only* kind that *can* well be given. In order to convey to a man some notion of anything that is quite new to him, and foreign from all his experience, it is necessary to illustrate it by a comparison with something else which he does know and has experienced. If the thing itself which we are speaking of be what we cannot fully understand, we may at least be able to understand what it is (in some respects) *like;* and thus, as by viewing a picture, may form some notion of the reality.

And even in cases where the same instruction might be conveyed in some other way, the Parable will often be found useful, both by giving us at the time a more lively

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true in the sense in which it is known to be understood, is what we should call by a name very different from "Parable."

idea of what is taught, and afterwards by fixing it more deeply in the mind, and affording occasions for recalling it to the memory, whenever the objects mentioned in the Parable happen to come before us.

There is an advantage too, even in the slight difficulty which occurs at the outset, in making out the drift and meaning of a Parable, so as to perceive the lesson it is meant to convey. This very difficulty rouses the attention, and gives an exercise to the thoughts, which makes the learner understand more thoroughly, and remember better. There is also a natural pleasure in perceiving any kind of *imitation;*—in finding one thing brought to resemble, or in some way represent, another very different thing. This is a great part of the pleasure afforded by pictures and statuary: and a good Parable or Illustration affords nearly the same. By this means an agreeable interest is created, which impresses on the mind the thing signified. And if the objects introduced in the Parable be such as are of common and familiar occurrence, there is this additional advantage, that we are thus often *reminded* of the lessons that we have

learned from them. In the great number and variety of our Lord's Parables, which are generally taken from very familiar objects, we obtain this advantage. The sight of a man sowing corn,—of a flock of sheep,—of a net cast into the waters,—of a house left unfinished,—of a fruit-tree, and of many other equally common objects,—may recall to the mind of one well-acquainted with Scripture, something that our divine Master has taught. He has as it were *inscribed* his lessons on almost everything around us.

There could not therefore have been a more suitable mode of teaching than that which our Lord adopted; especially, considering that most of his hearers were simple unlearned men, unaccustomed to deep thought, and only capable of understanding what was put before them in easy and familiar images.

Nevertheless, what He says to his disciples, when they ask for an explanation, might seem, at first sight, to imply that this mode of teaching was adopted on purpose to make a secret of the doctrines taught; and that He did not intend to be understood by the great body of the

people he addressed. "Unto you it is given," says He, [Mark iv. 11] "to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables; that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand, lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them."

Now in order to understand this passage rightly, it is to be observed, first, that the phrase, "That seeing they may see," &c., is not to be understood to signify "*in order that*," or "on purpose that," but "*so that*," the word in the Original being one which is very often used by the Sacred Writers in that sense. For instance, you read, in several places, that so and so took place, "*that it might be fulfilled* which was spoken by the prophet;" which, of course does not mean that the event took place *on purpose* to fulfil a prophecy; but that it *so* took place that the prophecy *was* fulfilled. The exact sense then of the passage will be "to you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to them that are without, all these things are done in parables,

so that seeing they will not see, and hearing they will not understand; so that they will not be converted," &c. "For in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias" (as our Lord goes on to say, according to Matthew's record). "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed." [Mat. xiii. 14.]

In the next place, it is to be remarked that the word "*Mystery*" is never used in Scripture to signify something concealed always, and from all men, but something which *had* been concealed, and is afterwards made known; as you find the Apostle Paul speaking of "*making known* the mystery of the Gospel, which in times past was hidden, but now is made manifest." And especially it is applied in cases where the knowledge is conveyed by means of some Emblem, Symbol, or representation, the meaning of which is explained; as we find in these Parables, which are thence called Mysteries. Thus, for instance, we find Paul figuring by the emblem of marriage the union between Christ and his Church. When he says, "This is a great mystery;

but I speak (*i.e.*, I mean) concerning Christ and the Church," the sense is, that marriage affords a figure to represent that union.

But still it may he asked why *all* were not taught the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven in such a manner that they would clearly have understood the whole. The answer is, that when these parables, simple and easy as they were, needed explanation, on account of the extreme dulness of the hearers, this explanation was given to all who sought for it as they ought; and those who would not, had only themselves to blame. He interpreted, we are told, "all things, in private, to his *disciples*." Now his disciples, you should remember, were, *all* who *chose* to be so. "Him that cometh unto me," said He, "will I in no wise cast out." All therefore who believed in Him as a "teacher sent from God," because, as Nicodemus said, "no man can do these miracles that Thou doest, except God be with him,"—all who being thus convinced by his mighty works, were willing to chuse Him as a Master, were readily received by Him as disciples, and obtained the explanations they needed. But those who came

to listen out of mere idle curiosity, or with a mind full of perverse prejudice, were left in ignorance, as they deserved to be. And accordingly He expressly says, [Mat. xiii. 11-12] "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of Heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." That is, the man who makes good use of the advantages offered him, will receive additional ones; and he who does not make that use of them will be deprived of them. If any persons therefore had complained that Jesus gave explanations to his disciples only, the fair answer would have been, "Why do not you become his disciples?"

If indeed any mere human teacher, like one of us, should deliver his doctrines in an obscure form, and offer to explain them to any one who would first profess an entire faith in him, the hearers might fairly complain of this, and ask him for some miraculous proof of the truth of what he taught. "If you tell us," they might say, "that the *Spirit moveth you* to say so and so, show

us a sign from Heaven to attest that this is true." The Lord Jesus did indeed declare that "the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him;" but then He appealed, in proof of this, to his miracles. "The *works*," said He, "that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." But for any uninspired man, destitute of miraculous powers, to demand implicit faith in what he says, and to require us to believe, on his word, not only that it is true, but that it is a direct message from Heaven,—this, so far from inducing any right-minded person to believe him, would justly expose him to the charge of a most profane presumption.

But if a man displays, as our Lord did, plain proofs of superhuman power, it is not unreasonable for him to demand belief in Him, even before his teaching is fully understood. And those of his hearers therefore who were *not* his disciples,—that is, who *would* not be so, though they beheld his miracles,—were utterly without excuse, and could not with any reason complain that their idle curiosity was left unsatisfied. Those again who *were* his disciples, received, through his condescend-

ing kindness, such explanations as were suitable to the extreme dulness of their understanding.

The Parable now before us is so simple and easy, that it affords a striking instance of that dulness in the disciples who required to have it interpreted to them, as well as of the amazing patience, and benevolent humility, of their great Master who thus accommodated his lessons to their weakness.

The seed sown, He tells them, "is the word of God." They could not fail, dull as they were, to understand this expression as meaning that the seed *represents* the Word of God. And so also when He said, "I am the true vine," they would readily understand that He was *representing* Himself under the figure of a vine. They never could have thought for a moment that the word of God was real literal seed, or their Master a literal vine. And in like manner, when, at the last Supper, He gave them bread to eat, saying, "this is my body," they could never have supposed Him to mean that He was holding in his hands his own literal body; but, familiar as they had

long been with this mode of speaking, they must have understood that the bread was an emblem or representation of his body. In fact that transaction was a kind of *acted Parable*, in which they were required to take a part. The bread and wine which Christians are commanded to partake of, in remembrance of their Master's giving his life for them, are symbols or emblems of his body and blood; that is, of the death He endured for our redemption.

By the Sower is represented our Lord Himself, and also his Apostles, and all other Ministers of the Gospel, down to this day. There is however one important difference between *our* teaching, now, and that of the Lord Jesus and his Apostles; that in *their* case, the goodness of the seed sown,—the truth, that is, of what they said—was attested by the display of miracles. In our case, on the other hand, you must judge for yourselves, by consulting the written Word of God, how far what we say agrees with that. That is the test by which all human teaching is to be tried. And our Lord Himself has warned us to be on our guard against false prophets. But even when we

sow good seed—that is, when what we teach is Gospel-truth,—the success of it, as we learn from the Parable, will very much depend on the soil it falls on. The seed is described as very far from prospering all alike, but as being—some part of it—sown in vain, and producing no fruit.

The different kinds of soil described in the Parable are of course meant to represent the different dispositions of men; the characters,—or hearts, as our Lord calls them,—of those who hear the Gospel.

And here it is worth observing, by the way, that we see, in what He says, in this and several other of his discourses, a proof of his prophetical power, and of his acquaintance with human nature;—what the Evangelist John calls his "knowing what was in Man." We find Him clearly foreseeing, and frankly foretelling, the ill reception which his doctrine would often meet with;—the rejection of it by many, and the careless disregard of it even by some who did not doubt his being really a heaven-sent teacher. That He should have predicted, I say, and forewarned his disciples that his Gospel would be so often preached

in vain, to the obstinate or the inattentive, as we know it actually was, and still is,—this affords one of the many proofs of his knowledge of Man's nature. If He had been an enthusiast, led away by the delusions of his own imagination, He would naturally have flattered Himself that the purity and excellence of his doctrines, and the glorious hopes which He held out, would have secured universal acceptance, and complete obedience. Or if, again, He had been a crafty impostor, then, though He might Himself have suspected a partial failure, He would not have run the risk of disheartening his followers by putting before them a discouraging view, but would have cheered them up with assurances of the most complete success. He proved that He was neither the one nor the other of these characters, by plainly foreseeing, and openly predicting, that his Gospel would so often be heard without profit.

There are several different ways in which good seed may fail of producing fruit. Some, accordingly, the Parable tells us, fell in the way-side, and some, on a rock, and some, among thorns.

Seed which falls on the way-side,—on the hard-beaten surface of a road,—cannot, of course, sink in so as to vegetate and take root, or be covered up from the "birds of the air," which are ready to devour it. So it is with a great number, unhappily, of those who hear the Word of God. A life of brutish, unthinking, contented ignorance, or of aversion to serious subjects, or of habitual sin, has made their hearts as hard as the beaten highway, and unfit to receive any impression. They attend perhaps public Worship, and hear the voice of a Christian Minister, because it is customary to do so, and has a decent appearance. And sometimes perhaps they have a curiosity to hear what is said, or are gratified by the eloquence of some preacher, or take pleasure in criticizing him. Some, who regularly go to church on Sundays, yet drop in, when great part of the Service is over; or are as utterly inattentive to it as if they had no manner of concern in it, or came only to look about them, and converse. Others again do attend, at least to the *sermon*, but without any thought of making any profitable application of what they hear:

I mean, any application to *themselves;* for there are many who are but too ready to make applications to their neighbours. And some, I fear, there are who even feel a satisfaction, and something of pride, in the regularity of their attendance on the service of the Lord's Day, who yet never even think of asking themselves whether they are at all the better for it during the rest of the week; —whether their feelings and their conduct are improved by it;—whether, in short, the seed that was sown has sunk in, and come up, and is growing, or is left merely lying on the surface.

Our Lord has described to us what is the natural consequence of such hardness of heart. Of the seed which fell by the wayside, He tells us that "the fowls of the air devoured it:" and this He explains by saying, "then cometh the Devil and taketh away the Word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

We have ample warning in many other passages of Scripture besides this,* that there is an evil Being who is, by himself or his angels, continually watching for our

* See Lectures on "Good and Evil Angels."

destruction, tempting us to sin, and labouring to frustrate and bring to nought whatever might be for our good. He will, of course, be especially busied in making us neglect or forget whatever good instruction may be offered us, and in removing any impression it may have made. But it is most important to observe how clearly this parable shows us the precise nature of the danger we are thus exposed to, and the means by which we may guard against it. The "fowls of the air" could not have devoured the seed if it had not lain unburied, on the hard surface of the ground. And in like manner, though it is the Devil that cometh and taketh away the good seed out of men's hearts, he could not do so if their hearts were not hardened. It is their own fault if they expose themselves to this danger.

If you listen earnestly and devoutly to God's Word, and with a sincere desire, and earnest resolution, to profit by what you hear, and with fervent and constant prayer for divine grace to enable you to do so, the assaults of the Tempter will fail. The seed will sink into the softened ground and take root there, and spring up. But if you

listen slightly and carelessly, or only for the sake of admiring or of criticizing what is said, or of applying it to your neighbours instead of yourself;—or if you take no pains to recall it and reflect on it, and impress it on your mind, in order to bring it into practice in your life,—the consequence will be what our Lord Himself has warned us of; the "Devil will come and take away the seed out of your heart." He will easily drive out of your memory what you have but slightly attended to. He will harden you against receiving any lasting and practical impression of that which you shall not have endeavoured to fix in your mind; and he will thus cause you to have heard in vain. But the blame will be yours, and yours the punishment, for having, after being clearly warned, left this opportunity for the tempter to succeed. We may learn from what our Lord has told us,—we may be assured, if there is any truth in the teaching of Him and His Apostles—that this enemy is at hand to frustrate the labours of the preacher, —to take away out of your heart the very words I am now addressing to you;—to harden in their thoughtless indifference those

who are inattentive;—to encourage and confirm each sinner in each kind of self-deception, and to draw off his thoughts from the state of his soul. But he cannot succeed in such attempts unless you favour them yourself. If your heart is not hardened by carelessness, or sin, the good seed cannot be thus easily taken away from it. And the power of Him who "clave the stony rock in the wilderness, so that the waters gushed out," is still ready, at our earnest call, to soften the hardest heart, and to sprinkle the good seed of the Gospel with the refreshing waters of the Holy Spirit, so that it will spring up and bear fruit unto everlasting life.

But our Lord warns us in this parable that there are several different kinds of unprofitable hearers; and thus guards us against that natural and very common mistake of carefully shunning some *one* kind of fault, and thinking little or nothing about any others.

I have seen in a religious work (and one may often hear the like), a distinct assertion that there are in the world two, and *only two* sorts of persons, the "converted"

and the "unconverted." Now this may, no doubt, be explained in a certain sense in which it would be true, and in which it would be not dangerous. And some such sense, doubtless, was what the Author intended. But in the most simple and obvious and natural sense, it is a plain contradiction of our Lord's teaching. The one says that there are only *two* kinds of persons in the world; the other teaches us that there are, at least, *four*. I say "at least," because our Lord does not here profess to enumerate all the possible varieties of *un*profitable hearers; but He does tell us of *three* distinct kinds, besides those who receive the word with profit: and moreover, even of these last He describes several kinds, when He tells us that of the seed in good ground, some brought forth thirty-fold, some, sixty-fold, and some, a hundred-fold.

After having spoken of the seed which fell by the way-side, He proceeds to the case of another class of persons, figured by the seed which "fell on a rock;" which "immediately sprang up, but when the sun grew hot it withered away, because it had no depth of

earth." This He explains as applying to those weak and fickle characters, who do indeed "receive the word with joy," and for a time believe, but in time of temptation (*i.e.* trial) fall away; men who listen gladly to God's Word, and do receive an impression from what they hear, but no *lasting* impression; not such as will stand firm when their faith or obedience are put to the trial.

The particular temptation to which our Lord's immediate followers were most exposed, was that of renouncing their faith in Him through dread of the reproach of the Cross; of the insult and persecution to which his disciples were, at that time, and still more, shortly afterwards, exposed. At present there is little or no trial of that precise kind, for Christ's followers, as such, to sustain. But we must not suppose that we have not other temptations of a like nature, to try the firmness of our faith, and the steadfastness of our obedience. Human life always has been, and always will be, a state of trial; and the steadiness of our principles will generally be put to the test in one way if not in another. Many a one whose feelings are warm and easily

excited, has proved to be the "stony ground" on which the seed was sown in vain. He has listened perhaps gladly to the tidings of salvation through Christ, and has been strongly impressed with a sense of the greatness and goodness of God, of the inestimable value of his own soul, and of the folly and danger of living in disregard of the judgment-day; his mind is awe-struck at the thought of an immortal state of being, beyond the grave: he is penetrated with a sense of the merciful condescension of the Redeemer offering Himself on the cross as a sacrifice for mankind: he is fired with the thought of the glorious inheritance which He,—that same Saviour—is gone to prepare for us: he is animated by the touching example of his heavenly virtues, and contemplates with delight the comfort, and peace, and purity, of a christian life, and the triumphant and rapturous confidence of a christian death. So far, all is well. But if he mistake the impulse of religious *feelings* for the implantation of religious *principle*,—if he do not both pray, and strive, and watch, seeking earnestly and constantly for grace

to fix deeply in his mind the impressions he has received,—if he do not patiently labour to "engraft inwardly on his heart the things which he has heard with his outward ears," and steadily to put in practice the lessons he has learned, the seed will have been sown on stony ground which has no depth of earth, and the plant will wither away.

Many a one, of an excitable but infirm character, whose feelings have been, for the moment, such as to promise the most favourably, has forgotten in a short time all the impression he had received, and yielded to the influence of any new circumstances that have occurred. Such a person is compared by the Apostle James to a looking-glass, which presents a lively image of any object that may be before it, but retains none. Sometimes a person of this character when thrown into the company of the light and frivolous, or of scoffers, will suffer himself to be laughed out of his faith, or at least out of the profession of it, and will be ashamed of maintaining any serious opinions; forgetting our Lord's assurance that He, "the Son of Man will be ashamed," of any such fickle

disciples, when He cometh in glory to judge the world. Some such men, when afflictions befall them, find their trust in God forsake them. They droop and despond, and murmur at the dispensations of his providence; and then wonder where are the promised comforts of Religion;—a religion which has not taken deep root in their heart; and they either give way to peevish repining and hopeless gloom, or else seek consolation from some other quarter.

Sometimes, again, if such a man chance to fall into the society of specious and fair-spoken teachers of error, he will be carried away by their plausible sophistry, and pretensions to superior intelligence, or superior holiness, and will make shipwreck of the faith he had once held. Or if he meet with those whose religious views are narrow, bigoted and uncharitable—who are full of pharisaical ostentation, or tinged with weak superstition, or extravagant enthusiasm,—he becomes disgusted with religion altogether, and throws aside the truth on account of the errors that have been mixed with it.

All these temptations and many other

such, men are as liable to, now, as at the time when our Lord was speaking: and they are trials which nothing but a *deep-rooted* principle will stand. And accordingly, we too often see the religion of those who appeared to others, and who thought themselves, the most sincere and hearty Christians, — who were accounted " converted characters"— wither away under such trials, like seed sown on a rock, " when the sun waxeth hot."

The first step to be taken, in guarding against this danger,—or indeed, any danger—is to be fully aware of it. If you have at the present moment strong religious feelings, and have formed good resolutions, and if you thence confidently take for granted that these will be lasting, and that the work is done, which is in fact only begun —that you have experienced the new birth, are a converted character, and one of God's People, and consequently sure of salvation, —that your regeneration necessarily implies final safety,—the consequence will most likely be, that all that has been gained will be lost again, and the plant will wither up. Those feelings will fade away, from not being carefully cherished. Those resolu-

tions will be forgotten, from not being diligently recalled, and dwelt on with meditation and prayer, and with careful self-examination. The same sentiments may perhaps be again awakened by some particular occasion; but they will again be lost as before, if they do not take deeper root; and they will "bring no fruit to perfection." For it is not a religious *humour* that is needed, but a religious *character*.

Many persons, I believe, are misled as to the point now before us, by the incautious use of such phrases as "conviction," "conversion," "repentance," "new-birth," or "regeneration," "election," "acceptance with God," and the like. They are misled, I mean, by considering each of these phrases as denoting something that is to take place all at once, and once for all; and that when this *has* taken place, all is secure, and no vigilant care is thenceforward needed. I do not mean that they are not aware of the necessity of persevering all their life in faith and in holiness. But they are not sufficiently aware of the necessity of *diligence* and watchfulness, in order that they may both thus persevere,

and also go on continually *improving* in christian character. But in truth, all these expressions, as we find them used in Scripture, have reference not merely to one single event at one particular period of our life, but to the *whole course* of our life. Conviction of sin, and Repentance—in the gospel-sense, which implies rejecting and abhorring and guarding against sin, and doing "works meet for repentance," is to occupy the Christian's whole life. The task will indeed become continually easier as you advance; because the longer you have renounced any sin, the more you will abhor it, and the more easily guard against it: and the longer you have borne the yoke of Christ, the lighter it will become. But if you imagine that repentance is one single act, after which all care and vigilance are thenceforward unnecessary, such a false security will expose you to the greatest danger. The like is to be understood in reference to the "new-birth." It is most true that "except a man be born again, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." But to be *born*, is not to be *perfected*. And as no child that is born will ever

reach manhood, if it be not nourished and taken care of, so as to thrive and grow, so, the Christian also, if he do not (as the Apostle tells us) "grow in grace," will never attain to "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

The seed "on the rock," you should observe, *had* undergone a new birth: for it came up, we are told, and sprouted from a grain into a plant. And it is quite necessary in order to obtain a harvest, that the seed *should* sprout, and a plant be thus *born* from it. But vegetation is not ripeness. The plant must (as we know) bring forth "first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear." And even such is the necessary christian course.

In like manner our "calling" and "election" to be God's People is an inestimable advantage to those who rightly avail themselves of that advantage by diligently striving to do his will; but it is so far from being any benefit to those who do not, (as the Apostle bids us) labour to "make their calling and election sure," that it exposes them to the heavier judgment; even as the Israelites whom the Lord brought out of

Egypt, were, from the very circumstance of their being elected,[chosen] to be set apart as God's peculiar People, subjected to the heavier judgments for their disobedience; so that He "sware unto them in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest." Nothing, in short, can more clearly represent and explain the character of the Christian's life than the very parable now before us. The good seed of God's Word must not only vegetate and spring up, but it must strike deep root, and grow, and continually advance towards perfection; even as corn that puts forth "first the blade, and then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear;" and brings forth no fruit unless it pass through all these stages.

The next class of persons that our Lord describes are those who are not incapable of receiving a deep and lasting impression from his Word, but who are too open to impressions from other things also. Their case he represents by seed which "fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it, so that it brought no fruit to perfection."

The land, in this instance, is represented not as deficient in depth or in fertility, but as producing weeds which overpower the growth of the corn. These weeds, as our Lord explains to us, are meant to figure the cares and pleasures of this world, which have so much hold on the affections of many men, as first to interfere with their devotedness to God, and at length entirely to overgrow it. Man, imperfect and corrupt as our nature is, may understand, through the Reason he is endowed with, the truth and the importance of the Gospel. . .Man has also a conscience [or Moral-Faculty] by which he can discern the distinction of moral good and evil.* Indeed, but for this, there could be no such thing as *Sin*. For we never attribute sin to a brute-beast, or to an idiot; though they often do what is odious and mischievous, and what *would* be sin in a rational Being.

And Man displays also on many occasions, in the pursuit of some object which is earnestly desired, such an ardent and active

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* As is pointed out (among other places) in the 2nd Chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

and persevering spirit as *would* fit him, if it were rightly directed, to aspire to "the prize of his high calling," and to "run with patience the race that is set before him." But no man is without the seeds of those other propensities and inclinations, which if left without control, or not duly regulated, will inevitably grow up into vices, such as will stifle all better sentiments and principles, and will cause the good seed of the Gospel to have been sown in vain.

To perceive fully the aptness of our Lord's illustration, you should observe that the "thorns" which the land produced were the *natural* growth of the soil; while the good seed was *sown* by the husbandman's labour. And as a natural consequence of this, when the two were left to contend together without any further care, the weeds, which were the original and spontaneous produce of the ground, prevailed over the seed that was sown. Even so it is with the soil of the human heart. The religion of the Gospel is not natural to it, although the heart may be rendered fit for it, and capable of maintaining its growth; even as land duly pre-

pared can maintain a growth of corn. And hence it is that the change which, for this purpose, must be produced in Man's heart by the Holy Spirit, is called in Scripture being "born again"—being made a "new creature," putting on the "new man," and the like. Love and obedience to Christ are not what will spring up spontaneously without any care and cultivation; nor will, when implanted,—when "*sown*" in the heart—maintain themselves there, without being carefully and watchfully cherished. Without this, christian feelings and principles will be rivalled, and in time overcome, by those passions, and those pursuits which *are* natural to Man;—by the cares (as our Lord warns us) and pleasures of the world:—by covetousness of gain, in some; by ambition of power, or of reputation, in others; in some by sensual gratifications; in some, by fondness for trifling amusements; and in some, by envy, revenge, and other malevolent passions.

It is to be remarked also that our Lord does not describe the thorns as merely springing up along with the good seed, and making the produce *less* than it might have been; but He tells us that they "choked it,

so that it brought *no* fruit to perfection." Thus He teaches us that worldly-mindedness and love of pleasure do not merely interfere with christian principle, but *gain* upon it, and finally overpower it. To the same effect He tells us in another place that "no man can serve two masters;" and that we "cannot serve God and Mammon."

Unhappily, however, one often finds men vainly endeavouring all through life to accomplish what Christ has pronounced impossible;—exerting themselves in a fruitless effort to serve two masters:—devoting perhaps one day in seven to the service (as they fancy it) of God, and the rest of the week to the service of the world, or the flesh, or the Devil:—or dividing their affections between God and some one favourite object that is at variance with his will. And the consequence of thus leaving the corn and the weeds to grow together, is, that these latter, being the spontaneous produce of the soil, will continually encroach on the corn more and more, and will finally choke and destroy it.

A remarkable testimony is borne to this by one of the ablest of the ancient heathen

philosophers whose works have come down to us. When he is describing the general characters of men of different times of life, he gives a much more favourable description of the young than of the old; attributing to the youthful mind many amiable qualities,—many generous sentiments—which he finds to be generally worn away in the aged. Now when you recollect that these two descriptions belong in fact to the same individual persons—since the old must once have been young—this shows, that, according to his observation, there is a tendency through life in human nature when left to itself to become worse.

But what tends much to mislead men as to their own character is, that it is so easy for them to perceive and to censure in one another the undue prevalence and usurping power of some inclination whose indulgence tends to alienate their hearts from God; while each one forgets that he may himself perhaps be under the dominion of some other not less usurping passion, quite different from his neighbour's, but equally at variance with subjection to Christ. The weeds which choke the corn are (as every one knows who

is at all acquainted with agriculture) not everywhere the same, but varying in different soils. The husbandman is always the most watchful against that kind of weed which most infests his own fields. But in what relates to moral conduct, a man is in general the most quick-sighted to those faults which his neighbour is most liable to, and the most blind to those thorns which are likely to choke the good seed in himself. The thoughtless and profuse are those that have most abhorrence of the vice of avarice. The avaricious condemn the prodigal. Those who indulge in luxury and indolence, pass the most just censures on the cares of the ambitious. Those who make reputation their idol, and seek for "the praise of men more than the praise of God," are especially severe on those who set a bad example; and so of the rest.

And each man is tempted to consider those circumstances which render him particularly liable to some particular kind of sin, as affording something of an excuse and licence for it. The young are liable to one set of temptations; the old, to another. The trials of *men* are different in some respects from those of women; and those of the

rich from those of the poor. And it is not uncommon for each class to console themselves with the plea that this or that kind of conduct or feeling is *natural* to them, considering their age, or sex, or circumstances. No doubt it is natural: and for that very reason it is to be the more carefully guarded against. The weeds that are the most natural produce of the soil need the more diligence in rooting them out. We should not be so earnestly exhorted as we are, in Scripture, to "put off the old man" —to "crucify the old man"—to "mortify through the Spirit the deeds of the flesh"— and to "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness"—if righteousness and true holiness were natural to us. Man's nature is frail and prone to sin; and Christ came to deliver us from sin, and from the eternal ruin which is the fruit of it, by renewing our nature. And as the hopes of the husbandman depend on his rooting out the weeds which are the natural growth of the soil, that the seed which he has sown may come to perfection, so does our salvation depend on the rooting out of evil propensities, that

the Word of God may bring forth fruit in us to eternal life.

The diligent husbandman will (as I have said) *root out* the weeds that infest his land, and not be satisfied merely to cut them down, leaving them to sprout up afresh: else, after he has apparently reclaimed a piece of rough ground, and has sown it, the same weeds which formerly grew among the wild bushes, will now fix their hold on the corn, and finally overpower it.

And a like culture is needful for the mind.

But sometimes a man who has been reclaimed from an ungodly and sinful life, and has become what is called a converted character, takes for granted that the religion which has been "*sown*" in his heart will at once make him a good man, without need of any care in the moral cultivation of his character. And the consequence too often is that his evil habits will re-appear, though in a somewhat different form, and will connect themselves with his religion, like noxious weeds twining round the corn. If, for instance, he had had a habit of disregarding truth, he will now practise what are called

pious frauds in the cause of religion. Or if he had been before revengeful and malicious, he will now become a religious persecutor. His mind, in short, will be like a field which has been sown indeed with good seed, but not thoroughly *cleared*, and afterwards diligently weeded from time to time; and which in the end will be found to have been sown in vain.

Lastly, you must remember that as there are many herbs which are not in themselves either poisonous, or unsightly, or anywise noxious, but which yet must be rooted out as weeds, when they interfere with the growth of the corn, so, it is for us to consider, not merely whether there is any harm in this or that practice,—whether such and such a sentiment, or pursuit, is sinful in itself, but whether we are allowing anything that is in itself harmless, to interfere with our devotedness to Christ's service. The most beautiful flowers are, you know, regarded as weeds when they hinder the growth of the crop. And just so, even the most innocent pursuits, and most amiable feelings, immediately *become* sinful whenever they tend to draw us off from christian duty. To withdraw

indeed from the world, and to renounce all its pursuits and gratifications, and to undergo voluntary sufferings and privations, as something acceptable to God, is far from being (as some followers of erroneous religions have imagined) at all required of the Christian. We are merely required to sanctify our pursuits and our feelings, and to let no earthly object interfere with our duty. This world is God's work. We are only required to "use this world as not abusing it." To withdraw from it, would be to withdraw from our duties. Only, we must not allow it to be our master, nor too much set our hearts upon it. "Whether ye eat or drink," says the Apostle Paul, "or whatsoever ye do, do all for the glory of God." "I pray not," says our Lord, "that Thou wouldst take them out of the world, but that Thou wouldst keep them from the evil." And it is not, certainly, his will that we should be destitute of natural affection; yet He tells us that "whosoever loveth father or mother more than Him is not worthy of Him." If the hopes of eternal life do not occupy the *chief* place in your heart, they do not occupy

the place which you must acknowledge they *ought* to occupy. Religion, if it be anything at all, it must be the chief thing,—the "one thing needful."

Remember then that not only is the Word of God preached in vain to those who will not attend to it; since the seed which fell by the way-side was devoured by the birds of the air, and not only is it attended to in vain by those on whom it makes no deep and lasting impression; as the seed which fell on the rock withered away; but even the best-rooted principles—the strongest impressions received from the Gospel, will be weakened and effaced, and finally overgrown, without a constant attention to guard, by divine help, against the encroaching nature of worldly objects;—against the indulgence of any desires that may interfere with our allegiance to Christ; since the seed that "fell among thorns" was choked with them and "brought no fruit to perfection."

And remember that even at this moment, if what has been put before you is agreeable to Scripture, the seed of God's Word is sown in your heart; and that for whatever

you shall have heard or read, you will be called on to give an account at the Last Day, and will either reap the fruits of it if you shall have studied to profit by the lessons learned, and lived accordingly, or else will incur the heavier condemnation, for having shut your eyes against the light of the Gospel, and turned a deaf ear to the call of your Redeemer.

It is a matter of the highest importance for each one to consider, and decide rightly, whether he is himself one of those represented, in the Parable, by the good land, on which the seed sprang up and bore fruit abundantly;—those, as our Lord tells us, "who in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."

These, and these only, are, in this Parable, marked out by our divine Master as fit for the harvest of the last great Day,—as inheritors of the blessed immortality He has provided for his faithful followers. As for the nations to whom the Gospel has never yet been preached, they are as it were fields as yet unsown. What will be their

final lot, we are not told; nor does it concern us to know. But of this we are assured, that those who do enjoy the opportunity of hearing "the words of eternal life" will be judged according to the use they shall have made of that opportunity. In all of *us*, the good seed has been sown; and it concerns us much to examine ourselves whether it has been thus far sown in vain, or whether it has "fallen on good ground." For, our Lord assures us elsewhere that "the servant who knew his Lord's will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes;" and that "to whomsoever much is given, of him much will be required."

And here it is worth while to remark that one portion of the Parable before us, which is omitted in Luke's Gospel, is recorded by two other Evangelists; that is, the mention of the seed which fell on good ground and prospered, yet not all prospering *equally*, but bringing forth some thirty-fold, some, sixty, and some, a hundred-fold. The same lesson as this seems to be taught in the Parable of the Pounds, in which the master is represented as placing an equal deposit in the hands of each of several servants; and

those of them who proved faithful, improved the deposit, but not all of them equally; and they are all described as rewarded, though unequally. The servant whose "pound" had yielded ten, receives double the reward of him who had only gained five. We learn from these parables that no efforts after increased and still increasing christian excellence, will pass unnoticed or unrewarded; that the more we labour to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour," the more acceptable we become in his sight; that "he who soweth sparingly shall reap sparingly, and that he who soweth plenteously shall reap also plenteously."

Let every one then who has any care for his soul, set himself to inquire diligently and candidly what is become of the good seed that has been sown in himself, and how far it has taken root and is growing and prospering. Do this, not once for all, but habitually. And above all, keep clear of the fatal error of putting off this examination till the close of life. When the time of harvest is just at hand and the grain ought to be full-formed and ripe, it is then, as we all know, too late for seed to begin to take root;

it is no time, then, to begin rooting out the thorns. Whether we have been profitable hearers of God's Word, or have heard it in vain, will indeed be a most interesting inquiry towards the approach of death, but not a serviceable one, because it comes too late. The past cannot be changed; and there will then be no future to amend. You cannot even resolve and *intend* to lead a christian life when you are yourself sensible that the hour of death is just at hand. You may indeed *wish* that you *had* done so; you may even believe that you *would* do so, if the trial were allowed you: but no one can properly be said to intend or to *resolve* to do anything which he is aware he will not be allowed to attempt. And if there be any such case as that of a death-bed repentance being accepted, it is at least quite plain that no such case is at all contemplated in this parable. The whole analogy of seed sown, and springing up and growing, and bringing forth its fruit, and ripening it, is entirely at variance with anything of *that* kind.

For the use then of any one who is sincerely desirous of thus inquiring into his

own state, I will suggest some cautions which may be useful;—cautions not only against false confidence and ill-founded self-satisfaction, but also against false alarm, and needless despondency or anxiety. For, both unreasonable trust, and unreasonable distrust, should be avoided.

(1.) In the first place, do not conclude that you are in a safe state on the ground that you do *no harm*. Even if your conscience does not deceive you on this point, and that you have no positive offence to reproach yourself with, still, if this is all you have to rely on, it is plain you have been an unprofitable hearer. The seed was sown in vain on that land which brought forth nothing at all; neither weeds nor corn. We are required not only to hear the Word and keep it, but to "bring forth fruits with patience." And the same lesson is repeatedly taught elsewhere: as, for instance, in the Parables of the Talents and the Pounds; where the servant is condemned who had let his deposit lie idle; and again in the Parable of the Fig-tree, which was sentenced to be cut down because it bore nothing; and also in that of the Vine, of which every branch,

we are told, which beareth not fruit, the husbandman "taketh away." Even therefore if any one could be sure that he had done no positive wrong of any kind, the mere negative fault of having done no good—of having not brought forth fruit,—would alone condemn him.

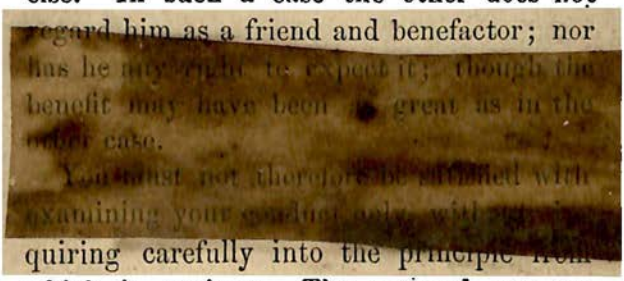
(2.) In the next place, you must be careful not to mistake a belief in your religion, and a respect and admiration of it, for a religious principle. Nor must you regard yourself as a religious character from attendance on divine Worship, and listening with interest to sermons, and reading religious books, and perhaps talking on the subject. All these are necessary indeed, but they are the means and not the end; they are not religion, but the *cultivation* of religion. The word which we have "heard with our outward ears" must be grafted inwardly in our hearts, that it may bring forth in us the "fruit of good living," and show itself in practice. And not only must your practice be right as well as your faith, but the practice must *spring from* the faith. You must not only do what our great Master enjoins, but you must do it *because* He enjoins it,

and abstain from what is displeasing in his sight, out of love and obedience to Him. Now there are many other motives leading to good conduct, besides love of God and devotedness to Him. Some of these are allowable motives; but to act wholly or chiefly from those motives, is no mark of obedience to the divine Will. If any one is honest and industrious merely because that is the surest road (as it certainly is) to wealth and credit, wealth and credit he will most likely acquire; but nothing else. If you are gentle and obliging, merely for the sake of living in peace and comfort with your neighbours,—or if you are pure and temperate merely for the sake of avoiding sickness and loss of character,—and the like,—" verily I say unto you, you will have your reward :" you will enjoy a greater share of worldly comfort, and credit, and peace, than you could have obtained in any other way; but if these were your sole object, these will be your sole gain; though the very same conduct if practised out of love and gratitude and reverence for your Saviour, would have been acceptable in his sight.

(3.) Next, you must remember that good actions may even become sins, if, like the self-exalted Pharisee, you make them a subject of proud and uncharitable boast over your neighbour; or if you presume to think that they can earn and claim reward at the hands of God, as a matter of right. For, "by grace," [favour] says the Apostle, "ye are saved, through faith; and that, not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." We are required indeed to bring forth the fruits of faith; we are promised rewards *according* to our fruits; but not *for* our fruits, as if they could be any benefit to our Maker, or could have any claim of merit towards Him. "Herein" (says our Lord) "is my Father glorified, if ye bring forth much fruit." But woe to him who thinks to glorify *himself* by his fruits! Such a thought destroys at once the christian character of any good work. In every case, a wrong motive will spoil a right action. All that is done is judged of according to the disposition of the doer.

And it is thus that every one views the conduct of every one else. Any good offices of your neighbour towards you, and the

gratitude you think due to him, you estimate not by the outward act alone, but by the motive from which it springs. If one man makes another's fortune, designedly, and out of pure regard for him, that other naturally would consider his benefactor as entitled to his warmest gratitude. But it often happens in the transactions of business, that one man will be the means of enriching another, incidentally, in the course of trade, and while merely seeking his own gain, without thought of benefiting any one else. In such a case the other does not regard him as a friend and benefactor; nor has he any right to expect it; though the benefit may have been as great as in the other case.



You must not therefore be satisfied with examining your conduct only, without inquiring carefully into the principle from which it springs. The outward acts are merely an indication—an outward sign (often a very imperfect sign)—to us, men, of the inward disposition on which depends the whole moral character of any action. But the disposition itself is seen by the Searcher of hearts. Virtuous *efforts* there-

fore, even if they should prove unavailing, are, in his sight, good works; and sinful attempts, even should they fail, are, in his sight, sinful acts.

Great watchfulness, and great candour, are required for the self-examination I have been speaking of; because there is such a *mixture* of motives in almost all human actions, that we are continually liable to deceive ourselves. You should therefore examine the more diligently whether you practise equally well those parts of your duty which are *out of the sight* of men;—whether you as steadily resist those temptations which lead to no temporal loss, or discredit, or inconvenience;—whether, in short, you are influenced chiefly by the desire to do the will of your Father who [illegible] and in that case, and in that alone, will "reward you openly." And you must continually labour not only to correct whatever is wrong in your *conduct*, but also to purify and improve the *motives* of even your best actions.

(4.) The last caution, accordingly, which I shall mention, under this head, is to re-

member that you are not a profitable hearer of God's Word unless you are continually improving. If you begin well, but mistake that beginning for the end,—if you are so well satisfied with yourself as to remit your vigilance and relax your efforts, you will not "bring forth fruit with patience."

The cares of the husbandman, you know, never cease till the harvest. He has first to prepare the ground for receiving the seed that is to be sown. But after it is sown, and is come up, and growing, continual diligence is required, in clearing off the "thorns" that would else spring up with it and choke it, and in guarding it from every other kind of danger. And even thus is the Christian exhorted not to be "weary in well-doing;"—to "forget those things that are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before, to press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now all these efforts, and precautions,—this self-examination and watchful self-correction, will be thought by many such a troublesome and anxious business that they will not be brought heartily to engage in

it; and yet they will readily undergo full as much labour and anxiety in their worldly concerns;—as the husbandman, for instance, does (according to our Lord's own illustration) year after year, in the cultivation of his land. And they think themselves well repaid for all, by success in those worldly concerns.

But judge for yourself, from a search of the Scriptures, whether all the care and all the diligence that have been described are not indispensably necessary for the Christian who would attain to the Gospel-promises. And then consider whether this is not well worth all that is required of us. And if you feel distrust (as you ought to feel) of the weakness of human nature in performing the task set before you, look to the offer of God's Holy "Spirit which helpeth our infirmities," and which is promised to them that ask it. This answers to the rain from heaven, and the sunshine, without which the seed sown could never prosper, and the toil and care of the husbandman would be in vain.

Remember therefore, lastly, that if you thus strive and watch and pray, you are

not to feel any distrust of God's promised aid, — any harassing doubt and painful anxiety whether, after all, your efforts will succeed, and you will attain, or fail of, the promised blessings. I would guard you against ill-grounded confidence which originates in error, and leads to carelessness; but I would establish that just confidence which rests on a right foundation, and which leads to effectual exertion.

When a man feels assurance that because he is one of God's People he will undoubtedly persevere in a christian course, and attain final salvation,—if he does not feel also that this must depend on his own persevering efforts and watchful care, he is under a most dangerous delusion. "Let him," we are told, "who thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." But if he *does* thus "take heed," this care will, through God's help, keep him from falling. And he ought neither to remit this care, nor again, to distrust that help.

In the every-day concerns of life, there are many things respecting which men are accustomed to feel full confidence, without being at all disposed, on that account to

relax their exertions. When a labourer, for instance, is returning to his home after his day's work is done, he does not usually feel any doubt that he shall reach his home. Perhaps you may say, he *ought;* since he cannot be quite certain that some unforeseen accident may not stop him. But what I am speaking of, is, the *fact;* that he generally does feel no more doubt than of the sun's setting. Yet this his confidence does not cause him to *stand still.* On the contrary, his confidence is founded on his full intention to walk on till he does reach his home.

So also, a General usually strives, before a battle, to inspire his soldiers with a full confidence that they will gain the victory. But this is neither meant by him, nor understood by them, as implying that they are to stand still without fighting. On the contrary, it is just what stimulates them to fight bravely.

Remember then that whatever confidence you feel of persevering to the end, must be joined with, and dependent on, a full determination to use that constant care and continued exertion, without which God's

promised help is not promised, and will not be bestowed. But confidence in what God does promise, is what we ought to feel: a confidence far beyond what can reasonably attend any expectation of worldly success. For when seed has been sown (to recur once more to the Parable,) and has fallen on good ground, and produced a flourishing crop, still, after all, a hail-storm or a flood, or some other destructive accident, may ruin the whole, and defeat the husbandman's hopes of a harvest. But it is not so with the seed of God's Word, when it falls "on an honest and good heart." For we are assured on divine authority, that "in due season we *shall* reap, if we faint not."

"Rejoice therefore in the Lord," says the Apostle, "and again I say rejoice;" being confident of this very thing, that He who hath begun a good work in you, will perform the same, unto the day of the Lord Jesus Christ.

LECTURE II.

The Parable of the Strait Gate.

THIS is one of those Parables (of which there are several in Scripture) in which there is no distinct *narrative* of any particular transaction, but merely an *allusion* to that which is to furnish the comparison for our instruction.

This parable our Lord puts forth twice:—First, in the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded by Matthew, where He says, "Enter ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." [Matt. vii. 13, 14.] And again, in answer to an inquiry, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" He said unto them, "Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able." [Luke xiii. 23, 24.] The answer which

our Lord gives to this inquiry agrees very closely with what He had said in the Sermon on the Mount. In both places He remarks on the straitness (*i.e.*, narrowness) of the gate and the path that lead to eternal life, and on the multitudes that will fail to enter into it; and in both, He signifies to us that our taking the right path or the wrong, is a thing not determined for us independent of our exertions, but is left to our own choice; for it would have been unmeaning and absurd to use *commands* and *exhortations*,—"Enter ye in;" "Strive to enter,"—if it did not depend on ourselves. It would have been like bidding us strive to add a cubit to our stature.

In the Sermon on the Mount, He mentions more distinctly the broadness of the way that leadeth to destruction, and the multitude of those who take that way. In the passage in Luke, again, He directs our attention to the circumstance that it is not all who have any care or wish to enter in at the right gate that will succeed, for "many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

It has been represented, if I remember

rightly, by several Divines, that our Lord intended something of a rebuke to him who had asked whether there were few that should be saved, as if his question had been one of idle curiosity; and that He refused to answer his inquiry. It does not, however, appear to me that the question either deserved to be, or was, censured as improper. It is, indeed, natural and almost unavoidable for every one to feel some interest in the question whether his fellow-travellers are going for the most part in the right road or the wrong; not merely on *their* account, but on his own; for though one may have no thought of taking other men's conduct altogether for the pattern of his own, yet it cannot but be some help to one's judgment, to know whether the course pursued by the generality of the world may be expected to be the safe one or the contrary. And as our Lord did not appear to blame the inquiry, so it is even still more plain that He *did* answer it as distinctly as He well could do, without actually specifying the number that would be saved; not so much in calling the gate "strait" (*i.e.*, narrow) at which they

must strive to enter, as in declaring that "many would seek to enter in and should not be able;" and in referring, as He seems to do, to his former declaration in the Sermon on the Mount, that many were walking in the broad path that leadeth to destruction, and that those are *few* who find the way that leadeth unto life, He indicates but too plainly that there *are* few who are in the way of salvation.

I have used the words "way of salvation" instead of "those that be saved," as it stands in our Version, in order to give, as nearly as our language will admit, the exact sense of the Original; which it is difficult to express clearly in English. The word in the Greek Original, you are to observe, does not relate to the *past*, or to the *future*, but to the *present*. The persons spoken of are not those that *have been* already saved, or that *will* or will not be *finally* saved, but those who are or are not at *present* in the road to salvation;—who are *being* saved. It is conceivable and possible that one who is actually in the wrong road, may, through God's grace, stop short, and turn back, and enter on the right path. And it is possible for

one who is now on the right road, to wander away into the wrong.

Next, you are to observe that the Jews in our Lord's time, though they held an opinion widely different from what He taught, were disposed to think that those in the way of salvation were a very small portion of mankind. For they thought that God's favour was confined to the Jews, together with such Gentiles as should have become proselytes; being as it were *made* Jews, by submitting to the Law of Moses. And they were inclined to hope that as "God's people" they would never be rejected by Him, however wicked their lives. And hence, Paul, in the Epistle to the Romans, speaks of God's name being "blasphemed among the Gentiles" through the sinfulness of the Jews. Now Jesus and his Apostles announced to them two truths, both of which were very surprising to them, and also very unacceptable:—First, that disobedient Jews would be rejected; and next, that obedient Gentiles would be accepted. The former of these was very early understood by the Apostles; but the latter,—the reception of Gentiles,—was a surprize to

them several years later. Peter, in the house of Cornelius, perceived with astonishment that "God is no respecter of persons," but that "in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him." But of both these truths John the Baptist had warned the Jews, saying, "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire." [Matt. iii. 8—10.] And in like manner our Lord in the parable now before us, says "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy pre-

sence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last." [Luke xiii. 24—30.]

If therefore you should meet with any one teaching that "God's people" (meaning those of his Party, and who have adopted his Creed) ought to grieve at the sinfulness indeed of the *world*, but should never feel any grief or alarm at their *own* sins, because God designedly suffers his own people to fall into most grievous sins, on purpose to *humble* them,* our Lord's words now before you may serve to refute him.

That those who are in the way of salvation are few, is a melancholy thought. But that

* I have myself heard these very words from a pulpit.

which most concerns us is what relates to our own safety. It is a most interesting—a most awful question for each one of us to ask himself—"Am I one of the few that will enter into life?" or, "*Which* is the path that I am now walking in?" And it is a question which every one should ask himself from time to time; not in a hasty and cursory way, but with a strict and particular examination of himself; such as every one may make to his own great advantage, if he sets about it in earnest, and which no one can be safe without making: for if you feel disposed to avoid looking narrowly into your own heart, and to drive away all thoughts of self-examination, because they make you uneasy, or to put it off till the time of sickness or approaching death, *that* is full and clear proof that you are *not* in the right way now; even as it is a proof, when any part of your body is tender and cannot bear to be touched, that it is not in a sound and healthy state. And the knowledge how, and how far, you may be astray from the right path, may enable you *now* to return to it. We *shall* know, indeed, well enough when we come to our journey's

end whether we have been in the right road or the wrong; but the knowledge will then come too late.

As it is most important therefore to look over this account now that there is time for improving the future, since the day will come when we shall think of nothing else, though there will then be no future to improve, I will suggest to you some heads of a self-examination, such as I am recommending, after having first cleared up a few words in the text which are liable to be misunderstood.

In the first place, you are to keep in mind, that, as I have already said, the word which our Version renders "*saved*," does not, in the Original, express either the *future* or the *past*, but the *present*. The word is in the present participle passive, which in our language is wanting. It denotes not those who *have* been saved, or who *will* be saved, but those who *are being* saved,—who are on the road to salvation; even as the word which is elsewhere rendered "them that are lost," means not those who necessarily *will* be finally lost, but who are now on the road to ruin.

Next it is to be observed that when the gate is called "strait," and the road narrow that lead to life, this does not mean that there is not space enough to admit all who strive earnestly and rightly, to enter in; "They that run in a race (says Paul) run, all; but one receiveth the prize; so run that ye may obtain;" *i.e.*, no one is here excluded from the "prize of his high calling," by the superiority of another; ye, all of you, will obtain it if you "run with patience the race that is set before you:" even so, I run, says he, "not as *uncertainly*:" *i.e*, I have no need to doubt, as in a race, whether I shall, after all my exertion, obtain the prize; it is promised to *all* who will duly exert themselves, be they many or few. "*Every* one," says our Lord, "that asketh, receiveth, and he that seeketh, findeth, and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened:" "Come unto me *all* ye that labour and are heavy-laden, and ye shall find rest unto your souls:" "if *any* man thirst, let him come unto me and drink;" and "him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." But his meaning plainly is, that the road to eternal

life is one which will not allow us to *turn aside* to the right hand or to the left, and to wander about according to our own fancies and inclinations: and on the other hand, the way to destruction is called a broad way, because it admits of so great a *variety* of tracks; since there are an infinite number of ways of straying out of the right road to any place, but only one of following it. And even so, our Lord means us to observe, there is but one course by which we can please God, but there are many different courses of sin. The multitude that are following, each his own corrupt inclinations, will be led by them in various directions, — though all these different paths lead to destruction; while the one line that is marked out for us in God's Word, is that which must not be left, on either side, if we would enter into life. The temptations in short, to forsake the path of duty are many and various, according to each person's disposition and situation; to watch and pray against them all, is the one safe course for each.

Another observation which it may be worth while to make, relates merely to the

use of the words *will* and *shall* in our translation, "Many *will* seek to enter, and *shall* not be able." From this, some might hastily conclude that certain persons are to be *prohibited* and prevented from entering into life; for such would be the force of the expression "shall not be able," according to our present use of the word "shall:" but such is neither the sense of the Original, nor the meaning of our translators. It is most important to be kept in mind, that there is not in the Greek, nor indeed in any language I know of, except our own, any such distinction as that between *will* and *shall* in English: "will seek" and "shall seek"—will not be able, and shall not be able, would be expressed by exactly the same words in the Original. And at the time when our translation of the Bible was made, the use of the words, "will" and "shall," was not precisely the same as at present: as for instance, when Obadiah is expressing his fears of the king his master putting him to death, he says, "Ahab shall slay me" [1 Kings xviii. 12]. We of the present day, should have expressed it "he will slay me." The not attending to this

circumstance has led to very serious mistakes as to the sense of several important passages in Scripture, for which reason I would wish it to be carefully borne in mind by all who wish to read the Scriptures with profit.

We learn then from what our Lord says about the wide and the narrow ways, in the first place, this important caution, that we are not to make the world our standard of right and wrong. If you would walk in the path that leadeth unto life, you must not justify or excuse yourself by the example of people in general. There is, perhaps, no one delusion of Satan by which he more commonly succeeds in drawing men on in the path that leads to destruction. He encourages those who are seduced by him to keep each other in countenance by their numbers. "Everybody does so, and so." "Nobody scruples this, or that;" "One must be like other people:" "I only do as my neighbours:" "this is the common practice:" "people expect one to do this:" "why, if so and so were required of us, there would be hardly any one that did his duty!" How common it is to hear such

observations as these! and how much commoner still to see the fruits of them;—to see men, that is, consoling themselves with the thought that they are allowed, and even in some instances, bound to do, and to leave undone, things about which the Scriptures, and their own conscience, if properly regulated by Scripture, would give them the plainest rules, merely because this is the practice of the generality. Now this very circumstance, if they attended to our Lord's warning, should rather awaken their doubts: "broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many are they that go in it;" and narrow is the way "that leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." We are not, indeed, absolutely to conclude that any thing is wrong *merely* because the generality practise it; but this circumstance, as far as it goes, is rather a presumption against it, than the contrary. It should, as I have said, *awaken* our doubts and suspicions, instead of lulling them to sleep; since we know that many are treading the broad path that leads to destruction.

Some, however, may suppose that our

Lord's warning applied only to his own times; since the greater part of mankind rejected his Gospel altogether; whereas we are living among Christians, and may more safely be guided by *their* example. Such was not our Lord's meaning. Human nature (and He "knew what was in Man") is always substantially the same. *Why* are the generality of the world,—(of that world at least in which we live) Christians, *i.e.*, *professed Christians*, acknowledging the divine origin of the Christian religion? Because they were born in a country which professes Christianity, and have never thought of taking the trouble to inquire whether the established faith is true or false. Are the generality *sincere* Christians? *i.e.*, do they earnestly set themselves to obey the Gospel, and to copy the example of their Master? We should settle this point first, before we justify ourselves by their example. Thus much is clear from our Lord Himself in that very discourse of his which is before us, that when He spoke of the many who would "*seek* to enter into life and not be able," He could not have been looking to those merely who

openly rejected the Gospel; for He goes on to say "when the master of the house has shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to say Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer, I know you not; then shall ye begin to say, we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets: but He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity." This shows but too clearly that great part of those many who will seek to enter into life, and will not be able,—"who are among the multitude that tread the broad way of destruction, are such as do call Christ, Lord, though they do not the things which He says."

"But I am not one of the Multitude," say some to their own consciences: "I am much better than the generality; at least there are many much worse." And this source of self-congratulation is one which hardly any one can fail to find, if he does but seek for it; for *he* must be bad indeed who cannot find, or at least fancy, some one else worse than himself. This is another of Satan's devices, and still more

dangerous than the other—of comforting ourselves that we are *like* the generality. It is equally an error to satisfy your conscience because you are *unlike* them;—to comfort yourself that you are better than great part of the world. We shall not be judged at the last day by a comparison of our lives one with another; but with the principles of the Gospel. No one will be punished because another is better, nor rewarded or acquitted because another is worse. Our Lord has warned us that the way which leadeth to destruction is broad; *you may be in that way*, without exactly following the track of some others;—nay, without wandering quite so widely from the right way. If others are worse than you, they will doubtless be more severely punished; but that will be small comfort, if your Lord shut the door against you, and bid you depart from Him. But yet many always do (and always will, to the end of the world) derive comfort and fancy themselves secure, by comparing themselves to advantage with some of their neighbours.

I know not whether, on the whole, bad examples do not do the most harm to such

as do not follow them; because so many persons are lulled by them into this false security, and flattered with this sense of superiority. A gross sinner keeps in countenance perhaps a few that are as bad as himself,—but three times as many who are *not* so bad, whose standard of morality is in consequence lowered; who flatter themselves that they are good enough, because they are of the better sort; and who compare their lives not with the Word of God, but with the lives of other men.

I press these considerations the more earnestly on your attention, because you whom I am addressing may be presumed to be of the better sort. There is a very large proportion, unhappily, whom I cannot address at all;—who set all thought of religion at defiance, and seldom or never show themselves in a place of worship, or read anything instructive. I mention such characters only to warn you not to think yourself safe, merely from not being one of them. Examine yourself by your true standard; consider, not, how much further others may be astray, but how far you are in the broad or the narrow path. "Many," says our Lord, "will seek to

enter in, and will not be able." Now such as I have been alluding to, do *not* seek:—but the thing for you to consider is that many who do seek, will not be able to enter. Dwell not therefore with self-satisfaction on the sin of those who will listen to no instruction, nor join at all in the public worship of God: but consider rather how far you yourself have profited by the instruction you have received, or neglected it; and how far you have worshipped God with your lips alone, or "in spirit and in truth."

And when I speak of the instruction you have received, or might have received, and of which you will most assuredly have to render an account at the last day, keep in mind, I beseech you, that we never demand your assent to anything on our own or on any other mere human authority. We do not "shun to declare unto you the whole counsel of God" as contained in the Scriptures, and we exhort you to search the Scriptures for yourself,—to "prove all things, and to hold fast that which is good." The standard by which you will be judged hereafter, and by which I would fain persuade you to judge yourself now, is not one

of our making. We dare not disguise the truths we find in God's Word, though they may sometimes be unwelcome truths; for "a necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel;"—we have no power to widen the strait gate, or to make broader the narrow way that leadeth unto life. We are only commissioned to point them out to you. If we were either to neglect this, or to represent things different from what they are, we should ruin ourselves, and endanger you; for if in laying down a chart of any coast for the use of mariners, or drawing a map of any country, a man were to leave out entirely some of the rocks and shoals and quicksands, or the hills and sloughs that were to be passed, he would not make the dangers and difficulties less, by thus concealing them, but on the contrary, would leave men unprepared for them.

Reject what the Minister teaches you, if you find that it is not agreeable to the Word of God; but, if it is, then, whether agreeable or not to your own inclination, do not satisfy yourself, as so many do, with hearing and not applying. To have the right path

pointed out, and yet to walk in the broad path, is very possible and very common; and what the end will be, depends, not on knowing the strait gate, but on striving to enter it. To take to one's self a merit in going to church on a Sunday, without endeavouring throughout the week to be the better for what is heard there, is an error which might seem too manifest even to need being mentioned; but there is none more prevailing, or more obstinate. And the mistake arises from this; that you are taught to believe it is a *good thing* to go to church; and so it is, if you labour to be the wiser and better for it;—if not, there is nothing good in it. It is a good thing to read the Scriptures, *if* you study to improve your life by them;—but if not, it is entirely unprofitable. It is a good thing that the land should be sown, if the seed comes up and prospers; if not, it is sown in vain. It is a good thing to listen to the advice of a skilful Physician, if you follow his advice; but merely *hearing* what he says, will cure no one.

Going to Church, and reading the Scriptures, are not Religion: they are only the

cultivation of Religion. These are but the means;—the improvement of the life, and the heart, are the end; and without this they are not only utterly vain, but do harm instead of good, because they flatter your conscience that you *are* religious already, and have no need of a total change. It is thus that men are kept the more constantly in the broad path, because they fancy themselves in the narrow one. This therefore is perhaps the commonest of all the errors by which so many "seek to enter in and are not able."

How many are there, for example, who have listened day after day, and year after year, to the explanations they have heard of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and of the duty of attending on the Ordinance; yet they hear all this, and go away satisfied that they have done a good thing in hearing a sermon; and come again to hear another, and still never think of attending at the Lord's table. How many excuse themselves, on account of the doubts and difficulties and scruples on that subject, which fill their minds; yet day after day, listen contentedly to the invitations of Christ's

Ministers to come and open their mind in private and seek explanation; yet never apply for anything of the kind. How many listen to all that is said against sensual indulgence, or worldliness, or the frivolous vanity of dress, and then go away satisfied, and come again after laying up for themselves treasure upon earth, and taking thought for raiment, decked out in all the finery they can obtain, to hear another sermon on christian feelings and duties. How many pass the week in dissipation, in intemperance, in earnest devotedness to worldly wealth, whether justly or unjustly gained, and contentedly hear sermon after sermon on the sinfulness of sensual excess, and the emptiness of worldly treasures compared with treasure in heaven. How many hear the duty of prayer—of private prayer and of family prayer,—inculcated, yet pray not, but come to hear another sermon without shame or remorse, and hear it with as little profit as before.

For all these things we must each of us render an account before God: and it is therefore, that I call your attention to them now, lest on that day the thought should

overwhelm you. Let each of you examine himself at home in private, how far the good seed of God's Word has fallen on a good soil in his heart;—how far he has profited by all the instruction he has received, and might have received; not looking out for excuses to justify himself and dwelling on the faults of others, but inquiring each for himself what there is that needs correction or amendment in himself. There is no use in seeking to widen the strait gate; neither you nor we can do that. The only thing to be done is to strive to enter in by it. We cannot alter the terms of salvation; we can only (through the promised aid of the Holy "Spirit which helpeth our infirmities") alter our own hearts and lives.

If we cannot make the Gospel more agreeable, we can make it more available to salvation. We well know, indeed, from what our Master has taught, that thousands will hear the word of God in vain, because "broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many go in that way:" but we his Ministers are bound in duty to Him, to speak his words to all, "whether they will hear or whether they will forbear;"

and we are bound to thank Him if we can be the means of turning even a few towards the strait gate. We rejoice; and the angels rejoice with us, even "over one sinner that repenteth."

Join your prayers therefore with ours that Christ our Master would prosper the work to which He has appointed us; that He may be with us always unto the end of the world,—"that it may please Him to illuminate his Ministers with true knowledge and understanding of his Word, and that both by their preaching and living they may set it forth and show it accordingly,"—and that it may please Him to give grace to his People to "hear meekly his Word, and to receive it with pure affection, and to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit" to the harvest of the last great Day.

LECTURE III.

The Parable of the Wedding-Feast.

MATTHEW xxii. 2—14.

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, and sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying: Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandize: and the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burnt up their city. Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding-garment: and he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding-garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.

THERE is no one of our Lord's Parables more interesting from the variety of important instruction conveyed in it, than the one now before us.

It is the more interesting from its being one of those (for there are several) that were not fully understood at the time, even by the disciples, and were not completely explained to them till several years afterwards.

This is the case with those Parables in which our Lord darkly hints at that great mystery—the call of the Gentiles to be God's People—which was fully revealed some years after the Ascension. Such was the case with the Parable—among others—of the Labourers in the Vineyard; in which the Jews are represented by those who were hired early in the morning, and the Gentile-converts, those who were not called till late in the day, but who were made equal to the first.

So also in the Parable of the Prodigal Son; besides the general Lesson taught in it, of the divine mercy towards a penitent, I have no doubt that the elder Son represents the Jews who had all along been kept in the knowledge of the true God; and that

the Gentiles, who had fallen into abominable idolatries, are figured by the prodigal who had wandered "into a far country."

The same also, I am convinced, was one part of the signification of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus; the condition of a diseased and destitute beggar, as contrasted with that of a man living in affluence and luxury, representing the spiritual destitution of the ignorant and idolatrous Gentiles, as compared with the wealth of divine favour and religious knowledge enjoyed by the Jews.

In these and some other Parables, there are given, as I have said, obscure hints, not understood at the time, of that great and astonishing mystery—as it was to the Jewish believers, "that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs," and should be put completely on a level with the "children of Abraham after the flesh." Any *one* of these parables, if it stood quite *alone*, we could not so confidently have interpreted in this way. But when there are so many, *all* seeming to convey the same kind of hint, this leaves no doubt, I think, that such was the design of all of them.

That the Apostles had no expectation of this call of the Gentiles, and that the revelation of it, when made, was most startling to them, you may see in the Book of Acts [ch. x. & xi.]. "Of a truth I perceive," says Peter, manifestly with great wonder, "that God is no respecter of persons, but that in every Nation, he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him." He had been taught by a vision that he should not henceforth "call any man common or unclean," as the Jews had hitherto regarded the Gentiles; yet "they of the circumcision (*i.e.*, the Jewish Christians) were astonished, as many as had come with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost."

And when in his own vindication, he relates all this to the other Apostles who had found fault with him, for going "to men uncircumcised," we find them exclaiming with evident wonder, "then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life."

Perhaps it may occur to you to inquire for what purpose our Lord gave, in several of his discourses, those obscure hints of the future calling of the Gentiles; since, after all, the

Apostles required to have it taught them by a distinct revelation to Peter long afterwards.

His object, doubtless, was to let them understand, when that revelation did come, that there was no change of purpose. They could collect from his former discourses (which now became intelligible), that He had all along designed this extension of the Gospel; that the Gentiles were (as Peter expresses it, in his 1st Epistle) "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God."

If a father were giving to his Son, or a landlord to his Agent or Steward, some directions which were wholly unexpected and startling, the person receiving those directions might be inclined to think they were a new thought,—the result of a change of mind. But if the other could then say to him, Look back at my letters written to you some years ago, and you will find passages which, at the time, you did not perfectly understand, but which you will now understand readily, as having relation to the very directions I have now been giving;—if he could say this,—the Son, or the Agent, would perceive that there was *not* any change of purpose, but that what

was now done had been all along resolved on, though it had not been thought right to make it known till the proper time was arrived.

Now just such, no doubt, was the purpose of those dark intimations given by our Lord which were explained by a subsequent revelation.

The Parable before us is, as I have said, one of those relating to this subject, the extension of the Gospel to the hitherto despised Gentiles.

The Kingdom of Heaven, — *i.e.*, the christian Church on earth,—is represented by a wedding-feast; this figure being chosen because it was, and indeed still is, in the eastern countries, a kind of festival which is celebrated with the greatest magnificence. The guests who were first invited, and who refused to come, and ill-treated the messengers,—these plainly represent the Jewish people, to whom, first, the Gospel was preached, and of whom the greater part rejected it, and murdered the Saviour, and persecuted his Apostles. The destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans about forty years after, is doubtless what our Lord alludes to when He speaks of the king in

the Parable "destroying those murderers and burning their city." And the Gentiles who were afterwards called, are evidently figured by the wanderers in the highways, both bad and good, who were indiscriminately invited to the feast.

And this, by the way, shows you that the Kingdom of Heaven here spoken of does not signify the future Church triumphant in Heaven; into which none but Christ's faithful followers will find admittance, but the Church militant on earth.

The next portion of instruction that we receive is that relating to the guest who had refused to put on a wedding garment. We are of course to understand, though it is not expressly mentioned—a garment *provided for him* by the giver of the feast.

This, though something wholly at variance with European customs, is so thoroughly conformable to the usages of the eastern nations, that it would be at once readily understood by our Lord's hearers. Many of you may perhaps be aware that the custom still exists in the East, of presenting, on extraordinary occasions, a rich outer garment to the

guests at a solemn banquet of peculiar splendour, given by a royal personage. On such occasions our ambassadors to the Turks or the Persians are presented with rich pelisses of very considerable value, which it would be regarded as a great affront for them to refuse to wear.

But the very ancient prevalence of this custom in the East, where customs hardly alter at all in many centuries, the mere English reader of the Bible alone may easily learn from the old Testament history [2 Kings, chap. x.] You may remember that when Jehu had formed the design of entrapping and destroying the worshippers of Baal, under pretence of a great sacrifice, followed, of course, by a feast, in the idol's temple, he gave orders to "bring forth *vestments* for all the worshippers of Baal;" which was accordingly done. Now, though it is plain from the narrative that this could not have been an invariable accompaniment of every feast, (since then it would not have been mentioned at all,) on the other hand, it could not have been anything unknown or unusual; since then it would have excited

suspicion among his intended victims. It was doubtless, then, as it is at this day, in the East, twenty-seven centuries after, a mark of distinguishing favour to the guests at some peculiarly splendid feast on a solemn occasion of rejoicing; even as you read in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, of "killing the fatted calf," for the returned lost one, and "bringing out the best *robe*."

Jehu's object evidently was to *mark* the worshippers of Baal by their wearing of these garments, that none of the worshippers of the Lord might be killed by mistake, when he gave the order to his armed company without to "go in and slay them." But, as I have just said, there could have been nothing strange and unusual in their being presented with these garments; else they would have been alarmed and filled with suspicion.

The guests then in the Parable are evidently meant to be described as not only invited to a sumptuous feast but freely provided, through their host's bounty, with such apparel as suited the occasion;—with a wedding-garment. They had not been invited by him because they were suitably

dressed; but on the contrary, they were suitably dressed, at his cost, because they had been invited. They had only to wear what he had provided.

I need hardly pause to point out to you how precisely all this corresponds with—what it is meant to represent,—the offer of Gospel-salvation. Men are not called to receive the divine favour, and to be made inheritors of heavenly happiness after death, on account of any claim of their own, or any pre-eminent virtue and holiness of theirs. The offer is freely made to those who will but gratefully accept it. And though it is true that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," *that* very holiness is what He Himself is ready to supply. It is the wedding-garment which the giver of the feast provides for his guests, and with which they are required to clothe themselves. For, that the wedding-garment of the Parable signifies christian holiness of character, is what I need not stop to prove or explain. It is perfectly evident to any one who does but at all understand the general drift of the Parable. No man, whether Jew or Gentile, could have any

claim of right to immortal happiness, any more than (in the Parable) a chance-traveller in the highway could have any claim to be invited to a sumptuous feast. Even if any one's life were one of perfect rectitude and unsinning obedience to God's laws, this would give him no claim to reward, but only to exemption from punishment. For, all obedience to God is but a debt due to Him; and justice does not assign a reward to any one for merely paying his debts. "When ye have done all things," says our Saviour, "that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done but that which it was our duty to do."

But our blessed Saviour has not only "gone to prepare a place" for his disciples in the mansions of his Father's house, but is also graciously pleased to qualify and prepare them for dwelling there;—to make "them meet for the inheritance of the saints in light;" He invites them to the great wedding-feast, and also provides for them the wedding-garment.

But He warns us also of the consequence of neglecting his offers, by the example of the guest in the Parable, who was expelled from

the feast and cast into outer darkness, for refusing to put on the robe prepared for him.

There is a doctrine (as you are probably aware) in several of the unreformed Churches, that the good works of some Christians of preeminent holiness (whom they distinguish by the title of Saints) are something beyond what is needed for their own salvation, and may be *transferred* to us, and placed to our account as if performed by ourselves. In answer to this it is commonly said,—and with great truth (1st), that no man ever did lead a life of complete sinless perfection, and (2nd) that if he did, he would be doing no more than his duty; all obedience to God's will being plainly a *debt* strictly due to Him: and no one can claim merit for merely paying his debts. But the error lies still deeper. For, the doctrine of these transferences of good works from one man's account to another's, proceeds on the notion —surely a most absurd one—that a man's good works are a real benefit to the Most High, and that He has *need* of our services. But (as you read in the Book of Job) "can a man be profitable unto God? as he that is wise may be profitable unto

himself. Is it gain to Him if thou art righteous?" If you owe your neighbour a sum of money, and some kind friend pays it for you, and places it to your account, the creditor is satisfied; since all that he wants is payment for his own benefit. But when God requires good works of us, it is for our *own* benefit, not for his; in order that we may become good men. Suppose a man to offer for sale a map, or some such work, to a publisher: the publisher cares not whether the man drew it himself, or got a friend to do it for him: he is thinking only of the profit he may make by the sale. On the other hand, if a schoolmaster sets a pupil to draw a map, in order that he may learn the art, and the pupil should present one drawn for him by a schoolfellow, he would be punished; because his master had no need of the map for its own value, but directed it to be drawn as an exercise for the learner.

And so it is with the christian virtues which we are required to practise. They are required as an exercise for ourselves, for our own benefit, not for that of our Master. But the notion of the transference

of good works from one man's account to another's, evidently goes on the supposition that God needs our services, and demands them for his own benefit.

The error of those, therefore, who hold this absurd doctrine of doing good works by proxy, is as if the negligent guest had thought that one of his companions might wear the wedding-garment in his stead, and have it imputed to him as if worn by himself.

Again, there are some persons who have adopted the theory that the righteousness of Jesus Christ Himself is imputed to believers; they being regarded by the Most High as having actually performed, themselves, all the good works which the Lord Jesus performed in their stead and on their behalf; even as a man may be accounted to have himself paid a sum of money which has been paid by another in his name, and placed to his account: which (as I have said just now) holds good only when he seeks to obtain the payment for his own profit.

Many strong objections to this theory have been urged by some of the most learned and judicious Divines of our Church; who remark, among other things, that it is

likely to lead to the error of "continuing in sin that grace may abound;" or at least of being careless about our own personal holiness of life and obedience to God's commandments, while trusting that we have already, by proxy, and through another person, perfectly fulfilled all righteousness. For if we believe that Christ's suffering *for* us and in our stead, the penalty of sin, exempts us from suffering it ourselves in our own persons, it would seem naturally to follow that his fulfilling all God's commandments for us and in our stead, and practising perfect virtue which is imputed to us and regarded as ours, should in like manner exempt us from the obligation of keeping God's commandments ourselves in our own persons.

I am well aware, and so were those Divines I have alluded to, that the theory I have been speaking of is held by some very good moral men, who are far from wishing to lead their hearers into carelessness of life. And they were aware that there are ingenious and subtle explanations of the doctrine by which the above mischievous inference from it may be avoided.

But it is manifest that there *is* a danger—and a very great danger—of man's practically drawing that inference; which certainly is the most simple and obvious one. And therefore we may be sure that Paul and the other Apostles, when writing, as they did, to plain, simple, unlearned men, would not have failed, if they had taught that doctrine of imputed righteousness which I have been speaking of, to warn and guard their hearers, by suitable explanations of it, against such fearful consequences.

But we find nothing of the kind in Scripture. For in fact the sacred Writers never do teach the doctrine in question at all. It is admitted I believe universally by those who hold it, that it is nowhere expressly laid down in Scripture. There are passages which a person already convinced of the doctrine may understand as containing some allusion to it. But that it is not a doctrine expressly taught by the sacred Writers is acknowledged. It is maintained by those who do maintain it, as a necessary portion

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* See Essay vii. (2nd series) on "Imputed Righteousness."

of a certain system or scheme of doctrines which they have framed in conformity, as they suppose, with what Scripture does contain.

But I would caution you, my christian friends, against adopting any such *developments* of christian doctrine, in this, or in any other point. Whether the *name* of developments be used or not, matters little. Distrust all teaching of doctrines—whether called High-church, or Low-church,—that are not distinctly revealed to us in the works of the Inspired Writers themselves. Be not seduced by the high pretensions to theological learning, or by the appearance of ingenuity, which such speculations may display. Be content to learn what the Scriptures plainly teach. We may be assured that whatever the Apostles deemed necessary Articles of christian faith, they have *plainly* declared, and often repeated. They never would have left any essential Gospel-doctrine to be collected by ingenious deductions from some elaborate theological system framed by ingenious men. They wrote, not for abstruse speculators, but for ordinary simple-minded readers; and to

them they urged very strongly and repeatedly what they were required to believe and to do.

And if you look to the plain teaching (of which, blessed be God, we have so much) of Christ and his Apostles, you will see that according to the natural and obvious sense of their words, "the righteousness of Christ" means that which He *taught*, of which He gave us an *example*, and which by his "Spirit which helpeth our infirmities" He enables *us* to practise. And that doctrine of imputed righteousness which I have alluded to, the Parable now before us seems expressly designed to guard against. At least it is plain that supposing such to have been his design, He could not have done it more effectually.

When our Lord instructed his hearers to be pure in heart, and gentle and forgiving, and liberal, and to do to others as they would be done by, &c., He surely had *some* meaning in all this; and what could it be except that they should strive to practise those virtues themselves? When the Apostles speak of the "same mind being in us which was also in Christ Jesus," they surely

meant us not merely to admire, but to imitate Him. And when they tell us that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his," they tell us also to "walk in the Spirit, and not fulfil the lusts of the flesh."

And surely such a Walk,—such a life, may very naturally and truly be called Christ's righteousness, since He *tells* us the way, and *shows* us the way, and *supports* us in the way. If you saw a tree whose branches were loaded with fruit, you would not hesitate to call this the fruit of that tree; being nourished from its stem and through its roots. And this is precisely the illustration which our Lord Himself employs. "I am the Vine," says He, "and ye are the branches: abide in me and I in you: as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the Vine, no more can ye except ye abide in me: for without me ye can do nothing." And does He then go on to tell his Disciples, that the fruitfulness of one branch will be *imputed* to another that is barren, and will be reckoned as if borne by that? On the contrary, He expressly says, "every branch in me that

beareth not fruit, He [my Father] taketh away." And again, He does not say "if ye love me, trust in my keeping the divine commandments in your stead;" but, "if ye love me, keep my commandments." And the same lessons are repeatedly and earnestly and clearly inculcated by the Apostles when they exhort their hearers to "put on Christ,"—to be "led by the Spirit of Christ,"—to "put off, concerning the former conversation [their mode of life before they had embraced the Gospel] the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," and to "put on the New Man, which, after Christ is created in righteousness and true holiness."

I am aware that that theory of "imputed righteousness" which I have been speaking of, is held by many who hold also the doctrine of Christ's death being a *sacrifice for sin:* but it is difficult to reconcile the two. A man might naturally, and not unreasonably, say, "If the unsinning obedience and perfection of Christ is so imputed to us as to be considered *ours*, we are *not sinners* at all: having thus, by proxy, 'fulfilled all righteousness,' we need no atonement." No doubt the difficulty might

be explained away by some abstruse metaphysical subtlety; but ordinary plain Christians will be likely to be perplexed or misled by it.

And I may add that the theory I have been speaking of, of Christ's good works being imputed to believers as if performed by themselves, has no countenance from the framers of our Prayer Book. Not only do they never mention it, but there is a passage in the Communion Service in which one may be sure they *would* have introduced the doctrine if they had held it. In the prayer just before the consecration of the elements, it is said "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, trusting in our righteousness, but in thy manifold and great Mercies." It is not, you observe, said, We do not trust in our own righteousness, but in Christ's righteousness. No! it is "We do not trust in our own righteousness, but *in thy Mercy*."

And among the many other places in which the same lesson is taught us, is (as I have above said) the Parable we have now been considering. The guests, we have seen, were freely invited to a splendid

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feast, and suitable garments were provided for them; but these they were required to put on, and themselves to wear; and the ungrateful guest who refused to do so, was cast out. No one was allowed to plead, "These rich vestments are yours; we have nothing of that kind that we can call our own; you are yourself clad in a pure and beautiful Wedding-garment, and that may be sufficient; your wearing it may be imputed to us; your wearing it in our stead may be considered as the same thing with our wearing the like." No; nothing of this kind is so much as hinted at. The guests had evidently been required, themselves to put on the robes that had been provided for them. And he who had neglected to do so, when charged with his neglect was speechless. Oh may it not be for any of us, my christian brethren, to be thus reproved, and thus speechless, at the great and final Judgment Day! Be assured it will avail none of us to plead our own natural weakness and helplessness, since our Saviour's Mercy has provided us with the strength and help, if we will but avail ourselves of his offers. And the more free

and undeserved his goodness, and the greater our need of it, the greater would be our ingratitude and sinful folly if we should not accept it in the way He has offered it. Nothing will it avail to plead the righteousness practised by Christ,—the good works performed by *Him*—if when He has—as the Apostle assures us, "left us an example that we should follow his steps," professed disciples of his do not labour to profit by that example, and to become truly his followers. The greater the benefit of having such a pattern set before us, the greater the sin of not striving to copy it. And to have been *called* to be God's People —invited, as in this Parable, to the Wedding-Feast,—will only aggravate the condemnation both of those who refuse to listen to the call (like the guests first invited) and of those who,—like the guest without a Wedding-garment,—do not strive to "walk worthy" (as the Apostle expresses it) "of the vocation wherewith they are called;" giving "diligence to make their calling and election sure."

Our Lord concludes the Parable by saying "Many are called, but few are chosen." Now

the word "chosen" or "elect"—for they are the same word in the Original—is one which has given rise to great disputes and much perplexity. But all of this is owing chiefly to a misapprehension of the real character of our Sacred Writings; which are not scientific treatises, but popular addresses: in which each Word is to be understood indeed, in the place where it occurs, but understood in reference to the context; —to the Writer's object in the very passage where it occurs. It is not so in a scientific treatise. In a treatise, for instance of Mathematics, or Chemistry, or Anatomy, we expect to find each term that pertains to the subject, confined to its strict technical sense, and always employed in that sense. And the student, if asked what is a triangle, or a circle,—what is hydrogen, or oxygen, —what is a muscle, what is a nerve, &c.: is expected to be able to answer correctly without reference to any particular passage. But it is quite otherwise with the Writings of the Evangelists and Apostles; who were not composing regular *systems* of scholastic Theology, but popular narrative, and popular instruction. And if therefore any sensible

man well acquainted with the real character of their Writings, is asked "What is the meaning of this or that Word," he will reply by asking, "in what passage?" If, for instance, he is asked, who are the Elect [or chosen]? he will say, Chosen to *What?* In the Parable before us, the guests first bidden represent the Jews: and these are perpetually called in Scripture God's "chosen People." But to what were they chosen? Evidently to be favoured with a divine revelation of the true God, and to be the keepers of his Oracles, and to have the Gospel first preached to them. But those of them who provoked God in the Wilderness, and refused to enter into the promised Land, were cast off by Him, and not allowed to "enter into his rest." And their descendants, having rejected and crucified the Holy One, were destroyed as a Nation, and scattered over the face of the whole Earth, as it is this day. And lastly, when the poor travellers on the highways were called to partake of the feast, this was from the free choice and election of the bountiful host; but the ungrateful guest who would not put on the Wedding-gar-

ment, was cast out. Those only were chosen to be allowed to *remain* partakers, who wore that garment.

We, my christian friends,—we all of us—are *chosen* by the divine goodness to enjoy the light of the Gospel; which has not yet shone on some millions of Africans and Hindoos, and Chinese. We are all, at this moment sitting as Christ's guests at that feast to which He has graciously invited us. But we shall not be chosen to inherit immortal glory, if we do not embrace his offers. Beware therefore lest you be like the guest who would not put on the robe that was provided for him. It is not indeed in your power, of yourself to make yourself a worthy and fit guest; but it *is* in your power to accept his offer of making you so. And it is also in your power to reject or to neglect that offer. "To-day therefore, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your heart, lest He swear unto you in his Wrath that you shall not enter into his eternal rest."

LECTURE IV.

The Parable of the Vine.

JOHN XV. 1—8.

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purifieth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are purified through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches; He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."

I HAVE slightly altered the translation of this passage, because our Version, though it gives correctly the sense of the Original, does not convey the full force of it: the words "purgeth" and "clean" not being likely to strike the English reader as connected with each other. But in the Original they are corresponding words; like

"purifieth" and "purified" by which I have rendered them.

The same correspondence, between the same words, is to be found in two passages of the Book of Acts; in which also our Translators have used two words which do indeed rightly convey the sense, but do not, in their sound, indicate that correspondence. When Peter in his speech at the council held at Jerusalem (Acts xv.) speaks of the Gentiles being admitted to the privileges of God's People, he says that "God put no difference between them and us, *purifying* their hearts by [the] Faith." Now evidently what his mind was full of was the vision in which this dispensation was revealed to him, when he was told "what God hath *cleansed* that call not thou common." Now the words "cleansed" and "purifying" do indeed agree in sense; but the connexion between the two passages is not so likely to strike the English reader as if the corresponding words had been employed; as is done in the Greek Original.

When Jesus in the Parable before us calls Himself "the *true* Vine," his hearers must

have understood Him to mean not that He was a real *literal* Vine, but that it was in the *highest* and most important sense that He called Himself such. I mention this, because there is a passage in our Church-Catechism which is sometimes misapprehended and which ought to be interpreted on the same principle as several of our Lord's expressions. It is said in the Catechism that "the body and blood of Christ are verily and *indeed* taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper:" which some understand as asserting what is called the doctrine of Transubstantiation; that is, that the real material body and blood of Christ are *literally* present under the appearance of bread and wine, and are literally swallowed by the communicants. But the expression in the Catechism is taken from our Lord's own words, who said "my flesh is meat *indeed*, and my blood is drink indeed." The word in the Original which is here rendered by "indeed" is sometimes translated "verily" or "truly." And our Lord meant (as did the framers of the Catechism) not that we are literally to eat his natural flesh, but, as He Himself ex-

plains (in John vi.) that by his flesh and blood is signified his "life, which He gives, for the life of the world." So also when He told his Apostles "this is my body," they could not possibly have understood Him to mean that He was holding his own literal body in his own hands. So, again when He said "I am come a *light* into the world," and when the Evangelist John says "this is the *true* light which coming into the world enlighteneth every man,"* they could not mean that He was a *literal* material light to the eyes, but that He was a light in a figurative, but nobler and more important sense.

We learn from this Parable (1st) That we can do nothing acceptable to Christ except through his aid, even as a "branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine." (2ndly) That we are required to glorify our divine Master by "bringing forth much fruit." Not that God can literally desire glory, or receive any from us, or that our good conduct is any advan-

* This is the correct rendering of the Original.

tage to Him; but that we are *required* to bring forth this fruit, just as if this *were* a real benefit to Himself; and that He has graciously promised to be a "rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," no less than if they *had* done Him a real service.

(3rdly) We are taught that as a branch which is incurably barren, is cut off and thrown away to wither, so, the Christian who "calls Jesus Lord, but does not the things which He says" will be rejected by Him at the last Day.

(4thly) We may further learn that as we call that the fruit of any tree which is borne by its branches, since these are nourished by the tree, so (as I remarked in a former Lecture) all the good works which our divine Master enables us to perform, may be properly called "the righteousness of Christ."

(5thly) And lastly, as we all know that a barren branch of any fruit-tree is never accounted fruitful on account of what is borne by *another* branch, so, we have no reason to expect that there can be any transferring of one person's righteousness to another, so that any one of us shall be

accounted to have himself done what *he* has *not* done, but some one else in his stead. In our Lord's descriptions of the Day of Judgment, He represents all men as receiving either blessing or cursing (Mat. xxv. 31-46) according to what each has himself done or failed to do. And there is no mention of any one's being punished for the sin of another, or rewarded for another's righteousness.

And all this is in exact agreement with the Parable of the Vine and the branches. But a contrary doctrine was very early introduced into the christian Church, by false teachers who called themselves Gnostics [" Knowers"], as professing to be the only ones who " *knew* the Gospel," and who pretended that of men who have this knowledge no moral conduct will be required, nor any Sin imputed to them, however careless their lives. And there are some such among us even now. It is against these that the Apostle John warns his People in his Epistle; saying (iii. 7) " Let no man *deceive* you: he that *doeth* righteousness is righteous." He is here, and throughout the Epistle, warning them

against those deceitful teachers I have been speaking of.

Examine yourself therefore candidly and carefully to try whether you have good reason for trusting that you are a branch, and a fruitful branch, of the "True Vine." Do you feel that love and gratitude and veneration for your Saviour, your Master and your future Judge, which you must be sensible you *ought* to feel? Are you just, and truthful in all your dealings; pure and temperate in your whole conduct; kind and helpful to all around you; gentle under provocation; patient in affliction; careful against temptations to covetousness, or vain glory, and all other evil propensities? If your conscience returns a favourable answer to such questions as these, then, you are to hope for, and strive for, continual *improvement;*—continual "growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord Jēsus Christ." For He Himself has told us that "every branch in Him which beareth fruit" our heavenly Father "purifieth it that it may bring forth *more* fruit." And if you feel satisfied to remain as you are, without seeking to *advance* in christian holiness, this

alone is a sign of your not being in a right state of mind. Those who have attained riches or power, are generally found ready to seize every opportunity of attaining still more: though of *these*, a man *may* have enough, and too much. But "blessed are they" says our Lord "who hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled."*

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* The following passages (to which many more might have been added) have been extracted from some theological Writers, and from Scripture, to show the striking contrast between the two. If we acknowledge those on the one side to proceed from the "Spirit of truth," it will be easy to judge from *what* Spirit the others proceed.

No demerit on the part of believers can arise to defeat the operations of God's grace. (Hawker's *Zion's Pilgrim*, p. 60.) The present life is not a life of probation or trial. (Ibid.)

The will of God to do good to his children does not depend on their will, or their faithfulness, or on anything in themselves. (Romaine's *Walk of Faith*, p. 258.)

As it was not any loveliness in Elect persons which moved God to love them at first, so, neither shall their unlovely backslidings deprive them of it. (Coles on *God's Sovereignty*, p. 294.)

The covenant of peace is not to be overthrown by trials, temptations, or Sins. So far from it, that these prove its stability and certainty.

Corruption has a tyrannizing power in the greatest saint: and falls into Sin are not falls from grace. (Hill's *Deep Things of God*, pp. 195-201.)

The righteousness of Christ is more than imputed to

the believer, and all the Elect really wrought out a perfect righteousness in Christ. (Ibid. p. 153.)

Repentance, being a change of mind, cannot be eradicated from the believer by any falls into Sin; and his state, godward, is not affected by his falls, though his peace will be much affected. (Ibid. p. 73.)

Although a believer may commit the same Sins as an unbeliever, yea, greater, for the matter of them, yet the believer's person, being screened from the curse of the Law, cannot come under condemnation, even though the actings of repentance should be for a time suspended. (Ibid. p. 34.)

The Devil tempts us to believe, through the medium of our feeling, that God takes notice, and is angry with us, on account of sin. (Bulteel's *Sermon at Oxford.*) &c. &c. &c.

Why call ye me Lord, and do not the things that I say? (Luke vi. 46.)

I know you not: depart from me all ye workers of iniquity. (Luke xiii. 27; Matt. vii. 23.)

If ye love Me, keep my commandments. (John xiv. 15.)

Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. (John xv. 8.)

God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him. (Acts x. 34.)

Let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the Devil. (1 John iii. 7.)

The grace of God hath appeared, which bringeth salvation unto all men,* teaching us that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly, in this present world. (Tit. ii. 11.)

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. (Phil. ii. 12.)

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* This is the correct rendering of the Original.

Bring forth fruits meet for repentance: . . . . Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, is hewn down and cast into the fire. (Matt. iii. 8.) Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit. (Matt. vii. 17.)

These things I will that thou affirm constantly; that they who have believed in God may be careful to maintain good works.

I keep under my body and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway. &c. &c. &c.

LECTURE V.*

Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard.

THIS parable is one which is (as I pointed out to you in the *Lectures on a Future State*, lect. xi.) often very strangely misinterpreted, and which is thence made to lead to very dangerous error. Many persons consider the labourers who were hired at the eleventh hour as representing those who have lived a life of irreligion and sin till old age reminds them of the near approach of death. But whatever may be the condition of such persons, it is plain that this Parable has nothing to do with *their* case.

"The Kingdom of Heaven," says our Lord, "is like unto a man that is an householder; who went out early in the morning

* N.B. In noticing the Parables of the Labourers in the Vineyard and of the Ten Virgins, it was judged sufficient merely to give a brief reference to the *Lectures on a Future State*, already published, in which those Parables are fully treated of.

to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny* a-day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the market-place, and said unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went. Again he went about the sixth, and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right ye shall receive. So when it was evening, the master of the vineyard saith unto his servants, Call the labourers and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they expected to

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* The Roman *Denarius* (called by our translators a "penny") was equal, in silver, to 7½*d*, and appears to have been the ordinary day's wages.

receive more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it they murmured against the master, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, who have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou not agree with me for a penny? Take what is thine and go thy way; it is my will to give unto this last even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Art thou envious at my being bountiful?"*

"Now you should observe that the labourers who did not begin to work till the eleventh hour, gave as a reason for their standing idle, 'because no man hath hired us.' They are not described as having been *offered employment before, and having refused* it: no blame whatever was imputed

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* This, and the other passages, quoted from Scripture, I have translated exactly from the Original; retaining, however, the words of our Translation, except where (from being somewhat obsolete, or from any other cause) they did not so clearly express the sense to readers of the present day.

to them; and accordingly, the lord of the vineyard was graciously pleased to take the will for the deed, and to pay them a whole day's wages; because it was not through any fault of theirs that they had not done the whole day's work. The case of these labourers evidently is designed to represent that of the Gentiles, to whom the knowledge of the true God was then about to be revealed, many ages later than it had been taught to the Jews. It is of these our Lord was speaking when he said, 'They shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.' They were left uncalled, as it were, till the eleventh hour, and were then put upon a level with the Jews; who were on that account disposed to murmur, and regard them with an evil eye. The Gentile nations, I say, and those individuals of the Gentiles who did not hear the glad tidings of Christ's kingdom till late in their lives, are plainly the persons denoted by the labourers in the Parable. It can have no reference whatever to the case of those Christians who have *had* and have *resisted* God's gracious

invitations, every day of their lives, and have *refused* to think of the next world till they are just about leaving this. Whatever excuse they may have to plead for such conduct, at least they cannot plead with any truth 'because no man hath hired us.'"

I pointed out also in that same Lecture that the case of the dying robber on the cross is completely foreign from that of a death-bed penitent; since he was manifestly already a disciple, and a favoured and accepted disciple, of the Lord Jesus.

LECTURE VI.

Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins.

THIS parable is sufficiently plain in its meaning, even when read by itself. But it ought to be read in conjunction with the preceding part of our Lord's discourse, which unluckily is placed in another chapter (Mat. xxiv.), though it is not only a part of the same discourse, but is particularly connected with this parable. The divisions into chapters and verses often obscure the sense of Scripture to those who do not know, or do not recollect, that these divisions were not made or thought of by the Sacred Writers, but were added long after their time.

Matthew xxiv. 42. "Watch, therefore; for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But be assured of this, that if the master of the house had known at what time the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken open. Therefore be ye

also ready; for in an hour when ye think not, the Son of Man cometh. Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Master hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Master, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all his goods. But if that evil servant say in his heart, My Master delayeth his coming; and begin to beat his fellow-servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the Master of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and will cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

Chap. xxv. "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them; but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried,

they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are going out.* But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you; but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in to him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Master, master, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of Man cometh."

I pointed out to you in the *Lectures on a Future State* what it is that we are taught in this parable: namely that the trial appointed for us is, how we shall conduct ourselves under the certainty that we *shall* be called on to appear before our Judge, and

* This is the marginal reading in our Bibles.

the *un*certainty, *when;* and that the time for making preparation for our departure from this life, is not after, but *before* we have received warning of the immediate approach of death. The foolish virgins who sought for a supply of oil for their lamps when the bridegroom's presence was announced, found the door shut against them. "Be ye therefore ready!"

LECTURE VII.

Parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Piece of Silver, and the Prodigal Son.

LUKE XV.

THESE three parables all relate to the same subject, the finding of that which was lost; that is, the ready reception mercifully afforded to a repentant sinner. But they do not all take the same view of that subject. They are designed to qualify and explain each other; each completing what is imperfect in the other, and guarding against a misapprehension of it.

And any one who is accustomed not only to read our Lord's parables, but attentively to study them, will have perceived that this was the mode in which He was accustomed to convey his instructions.

A painter who wishes to give us a good idea of some city, or building, or other object, will present us with pictures of it from different points of view; one, suppose, a prospect of it from the North, and

another, from the South: both, views of the same object, but from different quarters: so that though neither is in itself complete, both together will give us a correct notion. And so it is with our Lord's teaching. One, of his many and varied parables, will give us one view, and another, another, of the lesson to be taught. And hence it follows that those who take by itself, one, one portion of his teaching, and others another, will draw opposite conclusions from it, and will both be in error. You should take his instructions on each point, as a whole, even as He delivered them, and meant them to be received; and then you will find one portion serving to modify and explain another.

Thus, in the present case, He speaks of the joy with which a lost sheep and a lost piece of money are recovered, and then puts forth the parable of the returning prodigal. Now you may observe that in the first two parables the only thing dwelt on is the care bestowed in seeking that which was lost, and the joy at its recovery. The lost sheep, and the lost piece of money, are entirely *passive:* they can make no efforts

at all for their own recovery, but are carefully sought for, and are found by the diligence of the owner. On the other hand, in the Parable of the Prodigal Son, the father is not represented as going to seek him. He himself, of his own accord, having, on reflection, "come to himself," arises and "goes to his father;" and then it is that his father receives him.

Now if any one were to look at the first two of these parables only, and neglect the third, he might infer that a sinner is to do nothing himself towards returning to God, any more than a lost piece of money could do, but is to remain quite inactive, and will be sought and recovered by divine favour. And if another should look to the last parable alone, and neglect the others, he might infer that the sinner is to do everything for himself in the first instance, and that his returning to his father like the prodigal son, is to be wholly his own unassisted act.

But if you take our Lord's instruction as it was delivered by Himself, you will combine together these parables, of which the first two represent one portion of the case, and the third, another portion; and then

you will perceive that though God does seek and recall the lost, by the various means of grace that come in their way—even as the lost piece of silver was sought for,—yet the sinner is required, like the prodigal son, to strive to arouse himself, and to use his own exertions, as if all depended on himself.

This last parable has, I have no doubt, (like many other of our Lord's parables) a double application: one, to individuals, to illustrate the mercy of God towards a repentant sinner; the other, to nations, as representing God's dealings with the Jews and with the Gentiles.

This latter application was not likely, nor was designed, to be clearly understood at the time the parable was uttered, but received an explanation afterwards in the call of the Gentiles to the knowledge of the Gospel, and in the envious and perverse obstinacy of the Jews.

"A certain man" we read, "had two sons," of whom the younger wandered away into a far country, where he reduced himself to indigence by riotous living; and when he came to himself, he resolved to

throw himself on the mercy of his father, who received him with joyful kindness, and thus provoked the jealousy of the elder brother. This elder son represents the Israelites, among whom the knowledge of the true God had been always kept up. By the younger son is represented the case of the Gentiles; that is, all the other nations of the world; who, soon after the flood, wandered away from the worship of the true God, and fell into abominable idolatry, in which all except the Jews were living at the time our Lord spoke. By the return of the prodigal, and his gracious reception, are clearly signified the acceptance of the offers of the Gospel by many of the Gentiles, and their admission to God's favour. And the jealousy and anger of the elder brother at seeing the repentant prodigal thus pardoned and welcomed, is a true picture of the proud and envious spirit of the unbelieving Jews, who were indignant at the call of the Gentiles to be made heirs of those promises which they had long regarded as their own birthright and peculiar privilege. Their jealousy on this account was one of the greatest obstacles to their reception of

the Gospel. They could not endure the thought that the Gentiles whom they had always been accustomed to despise as aliens from God, should be not only received into favour with Him, but put completely on a level with themselves, without conforming to the Law of Moses. This made them averse to the Gospel. And since men are not apt to believe what they do not *like* to believe, they were thus confirmed in their rejection of Jesus; and for the same reason were more especially bitter in their hatred and persecution of Paul, on account of his being the Apostle of the Gentiles. And to this day they harden themselves against accepting God's gracious offers, because the same are made to the other nations of the world. They are "angry, and will not come in."

The other application of the parable—that to individuals—was suggested to Jesus by the occasion before Him. He had been reproached for keeping company "with Publicans and sinners:" to which He replied that those who were desirous of renouncing their sins and returning to God, were those who had the most need of Him; since their

Heavenly Father was willing to receive penitents into favour, and his angels rejoiced at their restoration. And He then illustrates God's merciful dealings with men by the parables which follow; which teach that those who are, or who fancy themselves, (as the proud Pharisees did whom He was addressing) "just men, who need no repentance," ought not to feel an uncharitable jealousy of the favour held out to penitents, but to rejoice, as the holy angels rejoice, at the recovery of a soul from perdition.

It would indeed be a great and most dangerous mistake, to suppose that those who have long lived an irreligious and sinful life, and have at length been reclaimed, are *preferred* by the Most High Himself to those who have served Him faithfully from childhood. But an *unexpected* good, —such as the recovery of a lost sheep,—is a matter of especial rejoicings. And to the *angels*, as well as to any of *us*, the restoration of a sinner may be an unexpected matter of joy. For we are nowhere told that the angels are endowed with the power which belongs to God Himself, of foreseeing all things, so that nothing that happens shall

be to them unexpected. And it is they, we are told, who rejoice over one sinner that repenteth.

These parables seem partly designed to guard against the misinterpreting of certain other parables. Our Lord had, on many occasions, set forth very strongly, both in parables, and in direct precepts, the heavy judgment awaiting those who either refused to hear Him, or heard unprofitably, or put off their preparation for his final coming till they should have warning of its near approach. You find Him teaching these lessons in the Parable of the Sower;—in that of the guests who refused to come to the wedding-feast, and of him who would not wear the wedding-garment;—and in the Parable of the foolish Virgins who neglected to provide oil for their lamps till it was too late. On the other hand, the parables now before us, and several other passages of the like import, serve to guard against any misinterpretation of those warnings, or any groundless apprehensions founded on them, as if the door of mercy was shut against penitent sinners. These parables in short are designed to encourage

sinners to repent: as those others are, to warn them against deferring their repentance.

The Prodigal, we are told, found, when he had squandered away his substance, his distress aggravated by a famine in the land. This seems to represent the unsatisfactory nature of all those sinful indulgences which tempt men to wander away from God's service. The degradation and misery of a man's sinking from a state of luxurious enjoyment which he had promised himself, to the state of servitude under one who sent him to feed swine, and who did not allow him even a sufficient supply of food—this affords a striking, yet faint and inadequate representation of the condition of those who are alienated from God. They may be perhaps, literally, clothed in costly apparel, and "fare sumptuously every day;" but the spiritual meat and drink of God's Holy Spirit is withdrawn from them, because they have withdrawn from it: and they are clothed, as to their souls, in the miserable rags of Man's unsanctified and corrupt nature. They may enjoy perhaps worldly credit, and even high reputation;

but they have forfeited the approbation of God, and the consolation of his support: and "no man gives unto them" anything that can supply its place. They may possess perhaps worldly power and high rank; but they are slaves to the great enemy of Man; they are the hired servants of the evil one; and he sends them "into his fields to feed swine;"—that is to minister to sensual appetites, or covetous worldly desires. And though they may perhaps possess superior abilities, and may be what the world calls shrewd and prudent and well-informed, they are for the most part stupidly blind to their own wretched condition. For though they may feel something of that dissatisfaction and uneasiness which generally attends the ungodly, they know not whence it arises, nor where to seek the remedy.

Such was the blindness of the prodigal in the parable; blindness first to his own degraded condition, and afterwards to the cause, and the cure of it. For as soon as he "came to himself," we are told, he then immediately resolved to "arise and go to his father," and immediately did what he had resolved.

This last circumstance is most important to be attended to; because the application of the parable in great measure depends on it. The parable does not apply to those only who are *fully sensible* of their own alienation from God, and of the consequent wretchedness and danger of their condition. A man may be in reality in that condition, —may have wandered into a far country,— before he is "come to himself" sufficiently to be fully aware of his own state. Let not any one therefore too hastily conclude that this parable in no degree applies to him because he is easy in mind. It may be that his conscience is lulled into a false security, and that he is not fully sensible how much he is alienated from God.*

Nor let any one flatter himself that he is safe because he is better than some of his neighbours. Not only may he be mistaken as to that fact, but he may also be mistaken —even if such be the fact—in the comfort he derives from it. He may be mistaken as to the fact, because he may be guilty of sins not less grievous than those which he

* See note A at the end of this Lecture.

censures in other men, but which a blinded conscience leads him to view with a more favourable eye. There are many different "far countries" to which we may wander away from our Heavenly Father. There are many different temptations, that is, which men of different dispositions, or differently situated, are disposed to yield to. And each is naturally inclined to condemn the most those to which he is least disposed, and to make allowances for the sins which the most easily beset himself.

And again if any one be correct as to the fact that there are others much worse than himself, that is not of itself any good ground of consolation. If he has himself gone astray from his Heavenly Father, and wandered into a "far country," it is no benefit to him that others have wandered still further. Each man should try his own life, and his own heart, not by a comparison with those of other men, but by the standard of christian duty. He will learn, if he will inquire in earnest, whether he has departed from that standard, and how far, and in what direction.

Are you at all anxious for the salvation of

your soul? Are you *more* anxious for that than for any worldly object? Are you studious and careful in seeking religious knowledge? Are you more diligent in acquiring that, than for any other kind of knowledge? Do you love, and reverence, and trust in, and strive to imitate, your divine Master and Redeemer? Do you labour to show that love, by keeping his commandments? Do you earnestly pray for the aid of his Spirit to assist you in devoting yourself to Him? Do you listen to the calls and suggestions of that Spirit, and strive against the temptations which the evil Spirit is continually throwing in your way? Are you, in short, as was promised for you at Baptism, ready "not to be ashamed of Christ crucified, but to fight manfully under his banner against sin, the world, and the Devil, and to continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto your life's end?" These are such questions as the Scriptures suggest for each Christian to ask himself, in order to try himself how far he is a dutiful son of his Heavenly Father, or how far he may have gone astray from Him.

The best Christian will, on such an ex-

amination, find much to repent of, and much to amend. For none of us really deserves to be accounted "a just man, who needs no repentance:" and he who is truly the best Christian will be ever the most ready humbly to confess his imperfections, and to bewail every, the least, departure from duty, and to set himself earnestly to amend whatever is amiss, and to improve and increase what is good. For, one who has even the least, and the fewest, of other sins, but is satisfied to *continue* in them, and has no anxious desire to advance continually towards perfection, is adding on one of the heaviest sins of all. Such was the case with those Pharisees who reproached Jesus for keeping company with sinners, and who were themselves the most grievous sinners, because they "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised all others."

But undoubtedly those who have been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," and from childhood have lived a christian life,—these do not need the same total change of heart, and principles, and conduct, as those who have hitherto been alienated from God;—who have lived

either in known sin, or in thoughtless carelessness about their souls, or in devotedness to the things of this world: who need a thorough reformation, and have a long journey to make, from a "far country," that they may return to their Heavenly Father.

Of those who are in this latter condition, many are, as I have said, insensible of their own wretched state. But if any one of these does "come to himself," so as to be timely alarmed at the thought of finally perishing, let him not despair, or distrust God's mercy. Let him "arise and go to his Father, who will see him, while yet a great way off, and will have compassion on him." But let him not imagine that there is any other hope for him. The prodigal, in the parable, was saved from perishing, and pardoned, and restored, not by *thinking* merely of his wretched condition, and lamenting it, nor by wishing for his father's forgiveness, nor by intending and purposing to return to him at some future time; but by setting off immediately, as soon as "he came to himself," and had formed the resolution, and actually returning to his father.

As for those who put off repentance till they shall have actually received notice to appear before their Judge;—till there is no time for quitting their sins, and reforming the future,—what their condition is, our Lord has sufficiently declared in the parable of the "ten virgins." Those who went to buy oil when their master's coming was announced, found the door shut against them.

It is plain that any one in the condition of the prodigal in the parable, if, instead of arising and going to his father, he should content himself with merely confessing and bewailing his own unworthiness, would never be pardoned and received. And this is likely to be the conduct of those persons who consider the Apostle Paul, in the 7th chap. of the Epistle to the Romans, to be speaking, not (as he manifestly is) of a man under the Law and not under the Gospel, but of himself individually in his present state, and describing himself as "carnal, sold under sin;" doing "the evil that he would not," and "brought into captivity to the law of sin," &c. For, as no one will hope to be at all superior to the

Apostle Paul, such a one will be apt to substitute the *confession* of sin for the abandonment of it, and the *approbation* of virtue for the practice of it. But it is plain that the Apostle did not mean the description to apply either to himself or to his converts; whom he had just been congratulating on "being made free from sin, and the servants of righteousness," and whom he immediately after describes as those "that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit."*

Next, you should observe in what frame of mind the prodigal sets out on his return. It is not only with a strong sense of his own misery, but with deep humility and self-abasement. "I will say unto my father, I have sinned against Heaven, and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son." If he had sought to disguise from himself, or from his father, his own unworthiness, he would have been in no right frame of mind for returning. And even so, if a sinner when conscious of his danger, turning his thoughts towards re-

* See note B at the end of this Lecture.

formation, endeavours to soothe his conscience by palliating his sins, and making the best of them, — if he seeks for all manner of excuses,—if he takes comfort from the supposed greater sins of his neighbours — and if he goes over the list of all his supposed virtuous acts, and good qualities, as if they would make some amends at least for his faults, — if, in short, he cherishes the thought of being worthy of acceptance with God, instead of strongly setting before himself his unworthiness, and throwing himself wholly on the divine mercy, as the prodigal did, on his father's, he is as yet in no fit state of mind for returning. He is not, in fact, as yet fully "come to himself." When his eyes are thoroughly opened, his heart will be humbled.

But let him remember that it is before God he is to humble himself, and not before a creature. "I will arise and go to *my father*," is the prodigal's resolve as soon as he "came to himself." He does not apply to a stranger, or to a servant of his father's, but goes straight to that kind parent himself.

Consult indeed, if you need instruction or advice, a Minister of Christ, or any other judicious friend; but imagine not that any mortal, whether priest or layman, —any living or deceased saint,—can absolve you from sins as against God. Go at once to your Heavenly Father, who "was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." In Christ Jesus, who assures us that "He and the Father are one," we have "an High Priest who ever liveth to make intercession for us," not "an High Priest who cannot be touched with our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin." Come therefore "boldly unto the throne of grace, that you may find help in time of need."

And you should observe, lastly, that as soon as ever the prodigal was thus humbled, —as soon as ever he was fully sensible that he had no claim to urge except his own misery and his father's mercy,—he set out immediately, without waiting for any other preparation than that preparation of heart. Had such a person waited till he should be better fed and better clad—in a more respectable condition of life, and of a more

creditable appearance—till he should be, in short, fit to present himself before his father — he would have waited for ever. For, it was impossible for him to obtain all this, except through his father's assistance. Let no sinner therefore think that he must first reform his life before he can presume to come to Christ and throw himself on his mercy, — that he must make himself worthy of pardon and acceptance by his own good works, before he can be fit to devote himself to his Saviour's service, —before he can be a worthy partaker of the holy communion of the Lord's Supper. The body and blood of the Lord Jesus, the symbols of which He charged us to partake of, were given for sinners. His Holy Spirit is promised to those who are sensible that they need it, and who earnestly ask for it. No one can become good, or fit, or worthy, by his own unaided efforts; any more than the prodigal could raise himself to wealth by his own unassisted exertions. Our own good works, even if they were performed never so punctually from henceforth, could not entitle us to pardon for any sin, because the utmost we can do, is (as our Lord has

assured us) no more than our bounden *duty*, and therefore cannot clear away past debts. And moreover those good works never *will* be performed without divine aid, which must be sought for in the manner God has appointed.

If indeed any one is contented to continue in sin, or trusts in his own goodness, and seeks not to be any better than he is, such a one is indeed unfit to come to Christ. But one who is fully sensible of unworthiness and weakness, and anxious to return to God, has as much worthiness as he can have. It is his Father who must "bring forth the best robe and put it on him;" that is, the "wedding-garment" supplied to the guests by the giver of the feast;—the righteousness which Christ's Spirit alone can clothe us with. He must be feasted on the spiritual food, the "bread that came down from Heaven" which alone can relieve the famine of the soul. It is this alone that can enable him to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." Any one indeed who should flatter himself that he does, or that he can, truly repent and turn to God, without bringing forth the

fruits of repentance, is far astray, and not likely ever to return. But those fruits must be a *consequence* of his devotedness to Christ; not the *preparation* for it. Being fruits of repentance, they cannot come before the tree, but must spring *from* it.

Let any one then who finds himself at all in the condition of the prodigal in the parable, imitate that example; and he will find that his Father "while he is yet a great way off, will see him, and have compassion on him," and be ready to receive him with kindness.

And let any one, again, who has hitherto dwelt in his Father's house, and has no need of such an utter change in his life and principles, but only of continual improvement, thankfully and humbly rejoice in that blessing; and not grudge the mercy held out to the penitent, but rather seek to reclaim any sinner that comes in his way. The great Shepherd will not "forget your labour of love" in striving to call back even one strayed sheep to the fold. And if you fail in such an endeavour, God, who sees the heart, will accept the will for the deed; —the endeavour, for the accomplishment.

But if you are successful, instead of being jealous of the acceptance of a penitent, you should rejoice in the recovery of a lost brother; knowing that the angels in heaven rejoice with you, "over one sinner that repenteth."

NOTE A, REFERRED TO AT PAGE 136.

"There is a remarkable phenomenon connected with insect life which has often occurred to my mind while meditating on the subject of preparedness for a future state, as presenting a curious analogy.

"Most persons know that every *butterfly* (the Greek name for which, it is remarkable, is the same that signifies also the *Soul*,—*Psyche*) comes from a grub or caterpillar; in the language of naturalists called a *larva*. This last name (which signifies literally a *mask*) was introduced by Linnæus, because the caterpillar is a kind of outward covering, or disguise, of the future butterfly within. For, it has been ascertained by curious microscopic examination, that a distinct butterfly, only undeveloped and not full-grown, is contained within the body of the caterpillar; that this latter has its own organs of digestion, respiration, &c., suitable to its larva-life, quite distinct from, and independent of, the future butterfly which it encloses. When the proper period arrives, and the life of the insect, in this its first stage, is to close, it becomes what is called a pupa, enclosed in a chrysalis or cocoon (often composed of silk; as is that of the silkworm which supplies us that important article), and lies torpid for a time within this natural coffin, from which it issues, at the proper period, as a perfect butterfly.

"But sometimes this process is marred. There is a numerous tribe of insects well known to naturalists,

called Ichneumon-flies; which in their larva-state are *parasitical;* that is, inhabit and feed on, other larvæ. The ichneumon-fly, being provided with a long sharp sting, which is in fact an *ovipositor* (egg-layer), pierces with this the body of the caterpillar in several places, and deposits her eggs, which are there hatched, and feed, as grubs (larvæ) on the inward parts of their victim. A most wonderful circumstance connected with this process is, that a caterpillar which has been thus attacked goes on feeding, and apparently thriving quite as well, during the whole of its larva-life, as those that have escaped. For, by a wonderful provision of instinct, the ichneumon-grubs within do not injure any of the organs of the larva; but feed only on the future butterfly enclosed within it. And consequently, it is hardly possible to distinguish a caterpillar which has these enemies within it from those that are untouched.—But when the period arrives for the close of the larva-life, the difference appears. You may often observe the common cabbage-caterpillars retiring, to undergo their change, into some sheltered spot,—such as the walls of a summer-house; and some of them—those that have escaped the parasites,—assuming the pupa-state, from which they emerge, butterflies. Of the unfortunate caterpillar that has been preyed upon, nothing remains but an empty skin. The hidden butterfly has been secretly consumed.

Now is there not something analogous to this wonderful phenomenon, in the condition of some of our race?—may not a man have a kind of secret-enemy within his own bosom, destroying his soul,—*Psyche,*—though without interfering with his well-being *during the present stage* of his existence; and whose presence may never be detected till the time arrives when the *last great change* should take place?"—*Annotation on Bacon's Essay on Death,* pp. 17, 18.

NOTE B, REFERRED TO AT PAGE 142.

Aristotle, in the subjoined extract from his *Ethics,*

agrees, as you will see, in substance, and almost in words, with what Paul says in Rom. vii. Many other passages to the same effect will be found in several of the ancient writers. But there are some persons so ignorant of what the heathen authors have said, and so unconscious of their own ignorance, as to imagine that no one not enlightened by the gospel could have used such expressions as those of Paul. The passage here given, from Aristotle, will serve as a specimen to show how greatly they are in error.

And the error is a dangerous one; because those who teach that the apostle is speaking of himself in his present state, nullify all the moral instruction they may give elsewhere. All their descriptions of christian virtue will be regarded as something very beautiful in theory, but quite impossible to be realized in practice. For, no one will ever presume to think of becoming a better man than the Apostle Paul. And any one who is living a life of gross vice, while acknowledging and admiring the excellence of a virtuous life, and who is, in practice, 'brought into captivity to the law of sin in his members,' will consider all attempts at reformation as hopeless, and will think himself in a safe state, as being in the very same state with a most eminent apostle. There is moreover a danger of this misinterpretation leading to infidelity, or at least to a disparagement of Paul's authority. For if you compare the sixth chapter of this epistle, and also the eighth, with the seventh, you will see, that, supposing him to have been speaking of himself throughout, he is made, according to the plain sense of his words, to fall into the most gross and absurd self-contradiction; such as no inspired Writer, nor even any man of good sense, could have been guilty of.

"*Extract from Aristotle's Ethics, B. 9, c. 4.*

"Some define 'a friend,' one who *keeps company* with you, and has the *same preferences, and sympathizes* with your sorrows and joys, etc., etc.

"Now all these things exist in the virtuous man, in reference to himself . . . . Such a one *agrees* in sentiments

with himself, and seeks the same objects in *every part* of his mind. And he wishes for, and acts for, what is *good* for *himself*, and what appears so; namely, for the *rational* portion of himself, which is what is most properly each man's self. . . . . He likes his own *company;* for the recollection of his past actions is agreeable, and he has good hopes for the future. And he, above all others, *sympathizes* with himself in pains and pleasures. For the same things are painful and agreeable to him *throughout his whole* mind, and not one thing to one portion of him and another to another; for he is, so to speak, exempt from regrets and changes of mind. . . . . But nothing of this kind is found in worthless characters. For they are at *variance* with themselves, and have a *craving* for one thing and a *deliberate will* for a different one; as is the case with those destitute of self-command: for they prefer to that which they themselves think *good for them*, pleasures which are *hurtful* for them. Some again, through cowardice or indolence, draw back from such actions as they themselves know to be best for them. And those who have committed many dreadful deeds, and are hated on account of their wickedness, fly from life and make away with themselves.

"Bad men, again, seek for some persons to keep them company, and fly from themselves. For, when left to themselves, they remember many things that are odious, and look forward to such conduct in future; but, in company with others, they are enabled to forget themselves. And, having in them nothing amiable, they have not towards themselves any of the feelings of a friend. They do not *sympathize* with their own pleasures and pains; for their mind is in a state of discord, and one portion of it is, on account of its evil nature, *pained* at abstaining from certain things, while another portion is *gratified* by such abstinence: and one part draws one way and another the opposite, as if pulling the man asunder . . . . for bad men abound in regrets.

"A bad man, then, seems not to have the feelings of a friend even towards himself, from having nothing in him worthy of friendship.

"Now, if such a *state* be an excessively miserable one, we ought earnestly to strive to avoid wickedness and endeavour to become virtuous. For so will a man become a friend to himself, and obtain the friendship of others."

LECTURE VIII.

The Parable of the Barren Fig-tree.

THIS Parable is one which our Lord may be said to have put before his hearers twice; once in words, once in action. For several of his miracles may be considered as acted Parables; that is, they gave a symbolical representation of something in the doctrines He was teaching. Thus, for instance, his giving sight to the blind represented (as He Himself pointed out) his enlightening the minds of his followers. And in the present case, what He had said in a Parable, of a fig-tree which the owner sentenced to be cut down as barren, was afterwards confirmed by his miraculous destruction of such a tree.

We read that "seeing a fig-tree afar off, having leaves, He came if haply He might find anything thereon; (and when He came to it, He found nothing but leaves;) for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus an-

swered and said unto it, no man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever."*

There are several passages in Scripture, (and this is one of them) which are likely to have presented little or no difficulty to those living at the time and in the country where they were written, but which may be obscure or perplexing to a reader in these days. In the passage before us, for example, the English reader is likely to understand by "the time of figs" the season when fig-trees bear ripe fruit; and our Lord's finding no fruit will seem to be explained by his seeking for it before that season was come. But then, this, which seems to the English reader the most natural sense of the passage, leaves a great difficulty; namely, why Jesus should have gone to seek fruit when He must have known that none could be expected; and why He should have pronounced a condemnation of the tree as barren, for not bearing fruit at an improper season.

But at the time when this Gospel was written, every one in those regions would readily understand by the word which we

* Mark xi. 13.

translate "the time of figs," the season of the fig-*harvest*, when the trees were cleared of their produce.

The same word [καιρος] in the Original is used in Matthew xxi., in the Parable of the Vineyard let out to Husbandmen, where you read of "the time of fruit," *i.e.*, the vintage —the time of the gathering. The harvest of figs is, in the East, the next perhaps in importance to that of corn; the fig, which is, in those regions, borne in prodigious quantities, being, next to bread, the chief article of food to the inhabitants. And accordingly any of you who are familiar with the Scripture histories must have remarked how important a place the fig-tree occupies in all the descriptions of the produce of the land.

Any one then might expect to find on a fig-tree, a little before the general gathering, some of the earlier figs, ripe; though after that, the trees would be found completely stripped; just as we might expect to find some ripe corn in the fields a little before harvest, but late in the autumn, none at all.

The chief difficulty however of the passage, arises from this; that the "time of figs" not being come, seems, as the words

stand, to be stated as the *cause* of Jesus finding none.

But the most probable interpretation is, that the words just before the word "*for*," are to be understood as a *parenthesis:* the "for" referring not to his finding no fruit, but to his having *sought* for it; so that the true sense of the passage is, that He came expecting to find fruit, because "the time of figs"—the time of clearing the trees—was not come; and He yet found nothing but leaves.

You may find in this very same Evangelist other instances of the same irregular and careless mode of expression (for such it certainly is) as in the passage before us.

For instance, in the very next chapter [v. 12] you read "they sought to lay hands on Him; and they feared the people; for they perceived that He had spoken this Parable against *them*." Now here, if you look merely to the words of this one sentence, without any thought of the general drift of the narrative, it would seem to be implied that the reason of their "fearing the people" was that they per-

ceived the Parable to have been spoken against themselves. But here, as in the other case, the words immediately preceding the word "for" are to be taken as a parenthesis: the "for" relating not to their fear of the people, but to the desire to apprehend Him. The sense of the passage evidently is, that they sought to lay hands on Him, because they knew that He had spoken against them, but were afraid that the multitude would take part with Him. And this is exactly the way in which the same narrative is given in Matthew xxi.

Again, you will find another instance of the same mode of expression in the last chapter of Mark's Gospel: "they said, Who shall roll away the stone for us? and when they looked, they saw that it was rolled away; for it was very great." Now here again, the words as they stand would of themselves seem to imply that the reason of the stone's *being rolled away* was its exceeding bigness. But manifestly, in this place, as in the others, the words immediately before the "for" are a parenthesis; the sense being that they were at a loss how

to roll away the stone on account of its being so large, but, on looking, saw that it was already rolled away.

There is a similar kind of expression in Acts xiv. where you read that at Iconium, the Apostles Paul and Barnabas converted great numbers both of Jews and Greeks; but that "the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and made their minds evil-disposed towards the brethren." "Long time therefore (the narrative goes on to say)—the Apostles abode there;" which might seem to imply, grammatically, that the reason of their remaining there was the evil-disposition towards them; though every one must perceive that the words refer not to the clause immediately preceding, but to the one before it; and that the Apostles remained therefore because they found many to listen to them.

Jesus then, came to the tree which might reasonably have been expected to have fruit on it, since the time of gathering had not yet come, and found nothing on it but leaves only; and thereupon He condemned it to wither up.

There can be no doubt what our Lord's design was. Evidently He intended to give a striking representation of what should befall those who should fail to bring forth the fruits that were fairly to be expected of them. He was giving a confirmation of the warning that had been before proclaimed by John the Baptist—"Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance; and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees; therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire."*

And on another occasion a fig-tree is the very object introduced by Jesus in one of his spoken parables: "Lo! these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none; cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?"

The transaction now before us may (as I have above said) be regarded as—what most of our Lord's miracles were—an acted

* Matt. iii. 8—10.

Parable;—a visible representation of what He had before said in words.

Next, let us consider what particular kind of persons our Lord had in view, in the warning here given. The actual tree, mentioned in this narrative (as well as the supposed tree in the spoken parable) was not, you will observe, one that bore evil fruit, but bore none at all, only leaves. The character corresponding to this, and to which the warning is addressed, is evidently not that of a person living in the commission of gross sin. Though it is true that "there is no man that sinneth not," this is not what Jesus was then adverting to. It was not the commission of actual sin that He had in view, but the omission of duty;—not evil fruits, but barrenness. And to the same effect is the warning given in another discourse about the same time, when He said "I am the true Vine and my Father is the husbandman; every branch in me that beareth not fruit, He taketh away." Yet some are accustomed to console themselves with the thought that they are *doing no harm*,—that they *wrong* no one; and seem to forget to ask themselves whether they are

seeking to do any *good*. The sentence on such is, "Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?"

And the same lesson is taught in the Parables of the Talents, and of the Pounds. The Servant who had received the one Talent is not charged with having misapplied or lost it, but is "cast into the outer darkness" for having let it lie idle.

Again, the Tree is not described as in a lifeless and torpid state, parched up by summer's drought, or benumbed by frost, and ready to be called into life and fruitfulness by warm showers. It was a tree in the full vigour of active vegetation, but expending all its vigour in leaves only, without fruit. This represents therefore, not those quite ignorant of true religion, or those destitute of all feeling or thought on the subject, but persons who do bestow attention on the subject, and have perhaps some religious emotions, and perhaps profess much, and talk much about religion, but let it expend itself altogether in talk, and do not bring it into daily practice in their life. Such a one is emphatically the barren fig-tree which our Lord is here re-

corded as condemning, and which the owner of the vineyard in the Parable charges his servant to cut down, because it is a useless incumbrance to the ground.

But ought we not to seek religious knowledge, and to cultivate religious sentiments, and to make open profession of our faith on suitable occasions, and to be ready, as the Apostle bids us, "to give to every one that asketh of us a reason of the hope that is in us?" Undoubtedly this is no less than necessary; and so also it is necessary that a fruit tree should bear leaves: no fruit can be produced without them: no tree can thrive without them: but if a fruit tree bear leaves *only*,—if all its vigour be expended on *them*, it is useless, and is sentenced to be cut down.

Now religious professions, and reflections, and discourses, are the leaves; christian *conduct* is the fruit; and "every tree is known by its fruit."

It should be observed moreover that though a fruit tree which fails to bear fruit is merely useless, our religious knowledge and study, and professions, and conversation, are much worse than useless, if not brought

into practice in our life. To use the words of Bishop Butler,—"going over the theory of virtue in one's thoughts,—talking well, and drawing fine pictures of it, this is so far from necessarily or naturally forming a virtuous habit, that it may even harden the mind in a contrary course, and create an insensibility to all moral obligations. For from our very faculty of habits, passive impressions, by being often repeated, become weaker, and thoughts by often passing through the mind affect us less sensibly." "Thus, familiarity with danger," (he goes on to remark,) "tends to produce passive fortitude; *i. e.* lessens fear; and familiarity with the sight of suffering tends to weaken the passive emotion of pity; while the active habits, on the contrary, of resisting or providing against danger, or of relieving suffering, are formed and continually strengthened by repeated acts."

If therefore you are not practically the better for all that you hear, and think, and say, concerning religion, you will assuredly be the worse for it; because your religious impressions will have found vent, as it were, in "saying Lord, Lord,"

without doing the things that He commands.

When it is first announced to a man that Jesus Christ has "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel,"—and in answer to his anxious inquiry "What must I do to be saved?" he has received the Apostle's answer, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved," this answer is (to him), sufficient to sum up everything; because when strongly impressed with wondering gratitude for such good tidings, he is likely at once to inquire eagerly what he can *do* to manifest his thankfulness and love, and how he can tread in the steps of his Saviour who "left us an example" "that we should follow Him" "who went about doing good."

But when men were become familiar with the Gospel, *then* we find the Apostles warning them to "give diligence to make their calling and election sure," and to beware of those who "professing to know God, in their works deny Him." Then it is that Titus is directed to admonish those "who have believed in God, to be *careful* to maintain good works."

And the Sacred Writers are not content, you may observe, with warning men against thinking that virtuous conduct is a thing of no consequence; but warn them also against imagining that if they are but careful about faith, a virtuous life will come of itself, without any care or thought about it: to guard against this notion they bid us "give all *diligence* to add to our faith, virtue, brotherly love, charity, &c."

These, and numberless other such warnings in the Sacred Writers, show the danger there was,—even in their time,—of men who had professed Christianity, becoming like the barren tree which bore leaves only, instead of "glorifying the Father by bringing forth much fruit."

Good works are, as our Article expresses it (in conformity with our Lord's own declaration) a "necessary fruit of a lively faith." No one can doubt what it is that Jesus meant by fruit. This evidently represents virtuous conduct;—what is usually called in Scripture good works. But there is one most important point of difference between the emblem in the Parable, and the thing signified by it: and if this point

were to be overlooked, we should be led into a grievous mistake. A fruit tree, we well know, is cultivated for the benefit of the *owner*. It is for his own sake that he wishes it to bear much fruit, that he may profit by that fruit. But it is manifest that it is not for his own sake, but for ours, that our divine Master commands us to "bring forth fruits meet for repentance." For, "can a man" (as you read in the Book of Job) "be profitable to God, as he that is wise may be profitable unto himself? Is it gain to Him that thou art righteous?" It is manifestly for the improvement of our own character, not for any advantage to Himself, that He requires us to practise virtue. This is quite evident, as soon as stated; and yet it seems to be sometimes in practice overlooked. For instance, when it is taught (as you are aware it *is*) that certain persons of pre-eminent virtue, called, in distinction from the rest of the christian world, Saints, have performed good works which not only give them a claim to eternal life, but are *more* than sufficient, and that the merit of these may be transferred to other men, who may thus as it were be vir-

tuous by proxy, this evidently seems to go on the supposition that the works performed are in themselves some sort of advantage to the Most High Himself. For if we regard all good works as being—which is the true view—enjoined for the benefit of the doer, —in order to make us good men,—then, it is inconceivable that another person's good works can be transferred to us, and considered as ours. Thus when a child (as I observed in the third Lecture) is set by his master to write an exercise, or to draw a map, if he employs a schoolfellow to do the task for him, instead of being rewarded he is punished; because it was in order to his own improvement, and not for the master's benefit, that the work was to be done. But, on the other hand, if any one offers for sale to a publisher a book or a map, it matters nothing to the purchaser whether it be the seller's own work or that of some friend who has given it to him. He only looks to the value of the work itself, with a view to his own profit.

It seems plain therefore that the notion of one person's good works being transferred to another and considered as his, must proceed on the supposition of some value in

the works themselves, as if they could be a benefit to the Most High; though no one can fail to perceive the absurdity of such a notion, when plainly stated.

Of the danger of pleading supposed merits of our own, as a claim on the divine justice, and thinking to earn salvation by our good works, some persons have been so often and so earnestly warned that they have almost a dread of the very mention of good works at all. But the best safeguard against that danger is not by rushing into the opposite danger of ceasing to be "careful to maintain good works," but by forming just notions of moral duty, and being (as the Apostle expresses it) "zealous of good works" on a right principle.

With this view, it is necessary to keep in mind three points,—all very obvious and intelligible—which will completely secure us against the danger of what some call self-righteousness; by which they mean self-justification.

(1.) We are to keep in mind, that (as has been just said) our divine Master can have no need of our services, nor can Himself be benefited by them, but requires of us

virtuous practice for our own benefit only, in order to the improvement of our own character.

(2.) We are to remember that all christian duty is a debt justly due to God; the very meaning of the word *duty* being that which is *due;* and that no man can claim reward for the mere payment of a debt, but only for something beyond what he was strictly bound to do. And though God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him, this is only from his own free and gracious promise: for "when ye have done," says the Lord Jesus, "all things that are commanded you, say, we are unprofitable servants, we have done only what it was our duty to do."

And (3.) we are to remember that it is only through the aid of the Holy Spirit "which helpeth our infirmities" that we can be enabled to bring forth that fruit—the "fruit of the Spirit"—which He requires of us. "As the branch," says our blessed Lord, "cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the Vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in Me; for without Me ye can do nothing."

Keeping in mind then the three principles that have been laid down—(1) that it is for our own benefit, not for his, that God requires of us good works; (2) that obedience to his will is a debt justly due to Him; and (3) that it is only by his aid we can perform this,—keeping in mind, I say, these principles, no one need incur either of those dangers I have adverted to: either that of claiming eternal life through the merit of good works, or that of hoping for it *without* good works.

To take a familiar and simple illustration. If some rich and liberal man establishes a school for the benefit of his poor neighbours, and, besides providing house and teachers, and books, and all other requisites, bountifully proposes prizes for the pupils who are diligent in learning, these children will fully trust to his fulfilling his promise, and bestowing those prizes on such as shall have made good use of the advantages offered them. They will feel sure that he is not "unrighteous that he should forget their work;" and yet the simplest child among them will understand that the prizes are a free gift of his

bounty, — that they are bestowed merely because he had freely promised them, and that the diligence and proficiency of those who receive them are no benefit to their bountiful patron, but only to themselves. And yet they will be no less sure that those who are slothful and inattentive will fail of their [illegible] as surely as if their negligence were [illegible] to the patron himself.

No[illegible] is world, you are to remember, is our [illegible]hool, in which, under our most gracious [illegible]atron and Master, we are being educated [illegible]for Eternity. We are placed here to learn [illegible]n the only way it can be learned, —*i.e.* [illegible] practice,—to form the christian character. It is for us to testify our love and gratitude,—to glorify—as the Scriptures express it—our heavenly Father, by bringing forth much fruit;—fruit for our own benefit, not for his; but for which He has graciously promised to bestow reward as if it were a benefit to Himself; for "inasmuch as ye did it," says He, "unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye did it unto me."

LECTURE IX.

The Parable of the Runners in a Race.

1 CORINTHIANS ix. 24-27.

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

THIS again is one of those parables in which there is no distinct *narration* of a supposed particular occurrence, but merely a *reference* by way of comparison, to something which the hearers had witnessed, or could easily conceive.

It was the practice of the Apostle Paul, as indeed might be expected from any judicious teacher, to deliver his instructions and exhortations on each occasion in a form suited to the particular parties addressed; and especially to make use of allusions to

any practice or any occurrence that might be familiar and interesting to his hearers. Hence it is that he often expresses himself very differently from what he would have done if he had been addressing a congregation in this Age and Country. What served to illustrate and enforce his meaning, then, will sometimes be found, now, to obscure or weaken it; and accordingly it is for us to endeavour to transport ourselves in thought to the times and places of those he is on each occasion addressing, in order that we may fully enter into their feelings, and derive equal benefit with them from his instructions.

The passage now before us is an instance of what I have been saying. Great part of the force and of the beauty of the comparison here introduced, and part, consequently, of the usefulness of the lesson conveyed, is lost to those readers who either do not know, or do not reflect on, the peculiar circumstances of the persons the Apostle is addressing, which made this illustration the more striking and the more instructive to them.

There can be no doubt, I think, that in

writing to Greeks, and more especially to Corinthians, the Apostle Paul had in his mind in this passage what were called the Isthmian games, (from the Isthmus of Corinth,) one of the four great solemnities which the Greeks from all parts were accustomed to celebrate by public contests of various kinds,—among others, by *races;* and to which games—connected as they were with their worship (being regarded as a kind of religious festival),—they attached a degree of importance which to us modern readers appears very strange. One of these four great festivals,—that which I have just alluded to, was celebrated at the Isthmus of Corinth; and though all of them were frequented, as I have said, by all the Greeks, this one, as being in the neighbourhood of that city, was likely to be peculiarly interesting to the Corinthians.

And the importance, as I have said, which they attached to these games,—the serious interest taken by all the Greeks in the contests which there took place, of wrestling, chariot-races, foot-races, and several others,—was far beyond what we

can easily conceive. Men of all ranks, up to the highest, entered the lists as competitors for the prizes; which consisted merely of a crown,—not a costly crown, but a garland of green leaves. Any Grecian city prided itself on a citizen who should have obtained the glory of a prize: he was received in public triumph as a great conqueror; and his name being solemnly recorded, served to fix the date of the events which occurred at or near the same time; just as, with us, Acts of Parliament are dated from the year of each Sovereign's accession.

Of course, corresponding exertions were called forth in those who were candidates for a glory so much valued. "Every one," says the Apostle, "that striveth for the mastery" (*i.e.* every candidate who comes forward in one of these contests) "is temperate in all things;" *i.e.* they subjected themselves (as we learn from heathen writers) to a careful and strict course of training, both in diet and exercise, practising whatever kind of exertion they were to be prepared for, whether running, or that exercise of the arms which Paul calls

"beating the air;"—living by rule, and conforming rigidly to the directions of skilful masters who had made that business their study; and undergoing this discipline for months previous to their final trial. And all this for the mere uncertain hope of the glory attached to the winning of the triumphant wreath with which the victor was to be crowned.

Familiar as all these things must have been to the mind of every Greek, we might expect to find, as we do, in Paul's Epistles, frequent allusions to something connected with these games; as when he exhorts his converts, "laying aside every weight, to run with patience the *race* that is set before us;" and again, "looking forward to those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." And again, "I have fought a good fight" (or rather "contest;" for the word in the Original belongs not to fighting in war, but to the contests of these games), "I have finished my course" (or "race"), "henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in

that day:"— besides several other such passages.

And thus in the passage now before us, he exhorts the Corinthians to run their appointed christian course, "not as uncertainly," since they are sure not to fail of the prize through *another's* superiority; but *all* of them to obtain it,—as many of them as shall have exerted themselves as they ought; and to strive, for the prize, not of a corruptible (perishable) crown,—a wreath of short-lived worldly glory, but for the imperishable prize—the never-fading crown of immortal happiness which God has prepared for them, and which they cannot miss but through their own fault.

Now all of us are to be considered, by the very circumstance of our *being* professed Christians, as champions in this race,—as candidates for this prize. And several of you who now hear me, have within a few months, come forward in the face of the Church to profess publicly your hopes and intentions in this respect,—to *confirm* and publicly renew what was done in your name in your infancy, and solemnly to profess yourselves enrolled on

the list of candidates for the crown incorruptible.*

It will be worth while therefore on this occasion, to consider a little more in detail the several points of agreement and disagreement between the two things which the Apostle is comparing; he himself suggesting to the Corinthians the *likeness* in some respects, and the *un*likeness in others, between the contests at these public games, and the Christian's course.

First, he remarks to them on a point of *difference*. "They who run in a race, all of them indeed run, but it is one that obtaineth the prize." In the christian course it is not so. In that there is no *rivalry* between the candidates,—no reward reserved for *comparative* excellence,—no danger of a man's losing his labour after all, through *another's* excellence; and thence, as he remarks, none of that "running *uncertainly*" which takes place in the competition of the Grecian games. He does not mean, of course, that all those he is addressing were necessarily in a safe state,

* A confirmation had shortly before been held.

and that there was a certainty of their obtaining the prize. They might fail of it through their *own negligence.* But he means that they could not fail of it *except* through their own negligence. A champion at the Games who might have prepared himself with the greatest care, was still uncertain whether, in spite of his utmost exertions, another might not win the prize from him. In the christian course, on the contrary, this kind of uncertainty has no existence. "In my Father's house," says our Lord, "are many mansions;" and from those mansions of bliss no one will be excluded by the worthiness of another, but only by his own unfitness. "Henceforth" (says Paul) "there is laid up for me [a] the crown of glory, which the Lord shall give me at that day, and not only to me, but to all them also that love his appearing."

And while, in a race, or in any kind of worldly competition, a man is under temptation to keep back, if it should be in his power, the other candidates,—in the christian course, on the contrary, the *reverse* takes place; for the more any one strives

to advance his christian Brethren, the more acceptable he is to his all-wise Judge. We find accordingly perpetual admonitions to forward each other's salvation;—"to build up (edify) each other in our most holy faith;"—to pray for one another and to endeavour to "recall a sinner from the error of his way:" to provoke [incite] one another to love, and to good works. And whether we succeed or fail in this, our sincere endeavours after each other's advancement are sure to be accepted as well-pleasing in our Master's sight. Neither the bad, nor the good conduct of others, leads to any uncertainty in respect of our own attainment of the prize.

And as the absence of this uncertainty,—the assurance that he who "runs with patience the race set before him," is in no danger of finally losing his labour,—as this is a most consolatory and cheering prospect, so the same circumstance suggests a warning also, to those who are disposed to derive a false comfort from comparing themselves to advantage with their neighbours. In the Christian's course,—as there is nothing to be feared,—so neither is there anything to

be hoped,—from comparisons between one man and another. In a race, or any other earthly competition, if it should so happen that *all* the competitors fall short of what might have been expected, still the *foremost* of them wins the prize. But in the race set before *us*, as you will lose nothing by another's excellence, so you will gain nothing by another's deficiency. If you lead a life of sin or of negligence, it will be neither an excuse nor a benefit, to *you*, that others have been more sinful or more negligent. The standard by which we must be tried at the last Day, is, not the conduct of other men, but the commands of God;—not the practice of the world, but the principles of the Gospel.

[ii.] The next point to be noticed is a point of *agreement*. "So *run* that ye may obtain." Both the champion at the games, and the Christian, is required to *exert* himself, not only in making his *first preparations*, and in *setting off* aright, but throughout the whole of his course. The runner who should start at the right point, on the right race-ground, and in the right direction, would not win the prize if he

should relax his efforts before he reaches the goal. And so also is the Christian required to "run with *patience* the race set before him;"—to "press towards the mark for the prize of his high calling;"—"not to be weary in well-doing, for in due season he shall reap, if he *faint* not." "I keep under my body" (says the Apostle, in this place) "and bring it into subjection" ("carry it off as a slave," as it is in the Original), *i.e.* I make all natural desires and propensities submit themselves and give way to the christian spirit, "lest by any means, after I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

The exhortations indeed to *exertion*, in various parts of Scripture, are even more frequently repeated than at first sight you might think was necessary: to *run*—to *strive*—to *labour*—to *fight*—to *work* out our salvation with fear and trembling (*i.e.* with anxious diligence)—all such admonitions are what one might suppose any sincere believer, possessing common sense, would supply to himself; and yet they are very often, and very urgently, pressed on us. And experience shows that a danger

there is, of the Christian's being so strongly impressed with a sense of what great things have been done *for* him, as to forget that there is much that he is to do himself; and again, so sensible both of his own utter weakness and helplessness if left to himself, and also of the intrinsic worthlessness, before God, of anything Man can do, as to underrate the importance to himself, of exertion and watchfulness. We are in danger, in short, of regarding ourselves, in reference to our christian course, not so much in the character of a *runner* entering on his race, as of a person taking his passage in a ship or some other conveyance. If such a one has carefully fixed on a safe vessel, under the guidance of skilful seamen, and bound to the right port, he has only to embark, and when once on board, has no more to do but to wait patiently till the ship reaches its destined harbour. In like manner, one may conceive a person (and would that one could only *conceive* it!) anxiously inquiring as to the right Faith,—labouring earnestly to bring his mind to the full acceptance of the Gospel-Salvation,—examining himself as to his devout trust

in God's promises;—and then, having been fully satisfied as to these points, and convinced that he is of the number of God's People, and is undoubtedly in the way of salvation,—one may conceive him thenceforward relaxing his vigilant exertion, and considering that his work is done; or at least that there is nothing more for *him* to do; or, nothing but what he cannot possibly fail to do, without any need of continued efforts, and perpetual self-distrust and anxious care. He seems to feel, in short, that he has, as it were, taken his passage in the right ship, and will surely be *carried* in it "to the haven where he would be." Whereas in truth he ought rather to regard himself as a champion on the race-course, who has started indeed in the right direction, having the goal before him, and whose limbs have strength to carry him onward till he reach it, provided he exert them in running, but who if he stand still, or relax his exertions in any part of the "race set before him," will never win "the prize of his high calling."

The kind of feeling I have been speaking

of—which is one that exists much oftener than it is distinctly expressed, may be traced perhaps in some degree to the mistaken application of several passages of Scripture. In the Apostolical Epistles, Christians are perpetually addressed as *Saints* (*i.e.* holy), as the *chosen* [or elect] People of God,—*heirs* of eternal life, &c. And we are told that "Whosoever is born of God, overcometh the world," and "doth not commit sin." Now do all these expressions mean that the persons thus spoken of are out of all danger, and their salvation secured, without any call for further care, and vigilance, and effort, on their part? Or do they mean merely that the advantages these persons possess have put them in the *way* of salvation—have a *tendency* to secure them from sin, provided they are watchful against it, and will surely *enable* them to obtain the prize, *if* they exert the strength with which they have been endued, in continually pressing towards the mark? In short, are the persons alluded to in such passages meant to be represented as having embarked on board a ship which will undoubtedly *carry* them to the right port, or

rather as men starting on the *race*-course, with the goal in view, and who are required to "*run*, that they may obtain?"

You may meet with persons who will string together numerous texts, — which may be easily found in Scripture, — insisting on the efficacy of faith in Christ's atonement; and from these they will infer that *this alone* is the Gospel-doctrine to be dwelt on; and that, if this be attended to, everything else will be sure to follow *spontaneously*. And you may, perhaps, meet with others who will bring forward (which is quite as easy) Scriptural exhortations to *exertion* in the *practice of good works;* and who may thence infer that *this* is the point which alone need be dwelt on for all practical purposes.

Turn away, my christian friends, from *both* of these, to the inspired Writers themselves, who taught neither the *one half* of the Gospel *alone*, nor the *other*, alone, but the *whole*, and who never put asunder what God has joined together.

Take, for example, what the Apostle says to Titus [ch. ii.]—"The grace [favour] of God, that bringeth salvation to all men,

hath appeared,* teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works." And again, [ch. iii. v. 5-8,] "Not by works of righteousness which *we* have done; but according to his mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life; . . . . these things (says he) I will that thou affirm constantly, [*in order*] *that* they which have believed in God, may be *careful* to *maintain good works*."

You have an easy test therefore provided, by which a plain Christian may detect error in teachers more learned and

* This is the exact rendering of the Original.

abler than himself. If any one's teaching seems to agree with that of Paul who says that "Abraham was justified through faith," and to disagree with that of James who says "Was not Abraham our Father, justified by Works?" or again, if he agrees with James and disagrees with Paul; or if he make different parts of Paul's writings contradict each other, you may at once conclude that he is not teaching that true Gospel which the Apostles received from the Spirit of truth.

Scripture is to be interpreted by Scripture: and if ever there was a case in which the Apostles have clearly explained their own meaning, this surely is one. "Brethren," says Paul, "I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." It is only at the time when he was fully convinced his life was just about to close, ("the time of my departure is at hand,") it is then only that he says [1 Tim. iv. 7], "I have fought a good fight, I have

finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day."

But we need not seek for explanations of his meaning by examining *other* parts of his Epistles, or of the rest of Scripture. We need go no farther than the very passage before us; "So run that ye may obtain; and every one that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown: but we, an imperishable. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

Continued care, and ever-renewed efforts, were, therefore, necessary, for the Apostle *himself*, in order that he might with "*diligence*," "make his calling and election sure." And his words will rise up in judgment against us and condemn us, if we so "wrest them" (as the Apostle Peter tells

us some have done) to our own destruction, 'as to make his teaching a foundation for confident carelessness.'

But even the Epistle now before us, in the part of it which immediately follows, will supply a sufficient warning. Let any one but look to the following chapter [x.], keeping in mind that the division into chapters and verses was not the work of the Sacred Writers, but was introduced long after merely for the sake of reference. And hence it sometimes happens (as in this case) that one chapter will end, and another begin, in the very middle of an argument, or even of a sentence. In our translation indeed, the 10th chapter seems to open a new subject; beginning with "moreover" . . . But according to the reading of the best MSS., it should be rendered "*For*, I would not that ye should be ignorant." . . . .

And thus the connexion which was in the Apostle's mind becomes clear: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest . . . I should become a castaway; for I would not have you to be ignorant that all our Fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea," &c. And then he

goes on to point out that though *all* the *Israelites* were God's elect [chosen] People, and had received advantages corresponding to those of the Corinthians, yet most of them, proving disobedient to the Lord, were cut off by his judgments. And these things he tells the Corinthians were written for "*our* admonition:" "wherefore," he concludes, "let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall."

(iii.) The next point accordingly, touched on by the Apostle, is also one of *resemblance*: "Every one that striveth for the mastery" (*i.e.*, comes forward as a candidate for a prize) "is temperate in all things;" or, (according to the exact sense of the Original,) "is in all respects under self-command." That is, (as I have above explained) he places himself under a system of regular discipline, and training. It is not that the champions inflicted on themselves any privation or any suffering for its own sake;—*on purpose* to give themselves pain: but they carefully abstained from everything that would be likely to impair their strength and swiftness; and used such diet and exercises, however troublesome and laborious, as would be likely to increase

their general fitness for the contest. And such, the Apostle describes as his own practice in all that relates to the christian course, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection."

Now one may hear some persons (and these I would wish you to beware of;—I mean, to beware of taking what they say, though often well-meant, and *capable* of a sound interpretation, in a perniciously erroneous sense) who speak of the utter impossibility of our doing anything that can forward our own salvation; and thence are of course understood, that nothing we can do can *hinder* our salvation; of all which, the natural consequence is an entire neglect of the Apostle's exhortations to exertion and self-control, which are now before us. And yet, all that they say is true in a certain sense; and in the sense probably which they themselves intend; viz. that our best actions can have no claim in themselves as meriting eternal life;—that even if we should do all that is commanded us, we should be but unprofitable servants, having conferred no *benefit* on our heavenly Master; and that we cannot even do anything that

is good without the strength promised by Him; so that even such christian excellence as we may exhibit is not properly our own, but his. All this is very true; and it might be said with equal truth that he who runs in a literal race is furnished by his Maker with his limbs and breath, and that it is God who has created even the ground on which he steps. Yet still he is required to exert himself in running,—to *employ* those gifts of Providence—if he would win the prize.

Suppose (as I observed in a former Lecture) some munificent founder of a school, to propose rewards to such of the pupils as shall have availed themselves of their advantages, and shall exhibit a due proficiency in their studies; they are furnished by him with teachers,—with books,—with all the requisites for study: he provides also the prizes they are to strive for; and all the progress they may make in learning is no benefit to him, but only to them. It is true, then, in a certain sense, that nothing they can do, unassisted by him, or assisted, can have in itself any claim to these prizes as a matter of right; but it is equally true,

that, circumstanced as they are, they will obtain or fail of the prizes, according as they are diligent or careless. Now it is in such a sense only that it can be said with truth that a Christian's exertions can avail nothing towards his salvation. Take care therefore never to understand such assertions in any other sense: and take care never to *make* such assertions unaccompanied by such explanations as the Apostle Paul gives. For, otherwise you may be answerable for leading men into the fatal error of inactivity, or careless security. For, if it be asserted and insisted on without any qualification or explanation, that nothing we can do can forward our salvation, how can we be safe from men's practically drawing the inference,—Why then should I attempt to do anything? Why should I run? Why should I strive,—watch,—fight,—labour,—work—throughout my life, if after all it is impossible for me to forward my own salvation? And he will be very likely to add,—Why should I be "temperate in all things," and diligently guard against sin? since, if nothing I can

do can *forward* my salvation, nothing I can do can *hinder* it. Whether this is a just consequence, we need not now inquire: it is plain that it is one *likely* to be drawn, with at least some show of reason. If to do a thing, (a man may say,) does not promote my salvation, to leave it undone, cannot hinder it: if to *run* does not tend to gain the prize, to *stand still* cannot tend to lose the prize: if temperance has no effect in advancing me in the divine favour, intemperance can have no effect in keeping me back: and so, of the rest.

As to the justness of this inference, I repeat, we need say nothing; but of the danger that such inference *will* be drawn. Be careful therefore not to lead any one,—nor to let any one lead you, into this snare of Satan. But attend to, and seek to impress on others, the precepts and the example of the Apostle, who tells us that his great Master has prepared for them "who by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life;" and who declares that he himself never ceased to "*run* his race"—"to *fight* the

good fight," and to "keep under his body, and bring it into subjection, lest he should become a castaway."

[iv.] The last thing to be noticed of the several points to which the Apostle directs our notice, is one of *un*likeness between the two cases: *they* do it to obtain a corruptible [perishable] crown, but we an "imperishable."

The fruit of all the toil and self-restraint and exertion of the champion, if after all he should chance to prove the winner, was, to be crowned by the Umpire with a wreath, amid the shouts of the multitude, —to be welcomed with triumph by his friends and countrymen,—to have his name publicly registered—and to enjoy a certain degree of credit and distinction for the few years of man's life on earth.

And with us also, every merely temporal advancement and honour, of whatever kind, that we may be aiming at, may be regarded as a "*corruptible* crown," — a perishable good; which,—besides the *uncertainty* of attainment, and besides its unspeakable *inferiority* in itself, to "the glory that shall be revealed," — is more-

over, sure to come to an end in a very few years.

And yet, if there be any young person whose abilities are such, and whose circumstances and situation in life are also such, as to make it (not *certain*, indeed; for that cannot be, in human affairs; but) highly *probable* that by steady application for a few years, to some study marked out for him, and vigilant activity, and self-denial, he will attain to great eminence, wealth, and worldly comfort,—if there be any young person so circumstanced, and yet he cannot be induced by such prospects to exert himself, and forego present ease and enjoyment, most people greatly wonder at, and severely blame his short-sighted folly. Yet how immeasurably greater would be his folly, if, when he *did* cheerfully submit to years of toil and self-denial for the sake of a good chance (and it never can be more) of attaining a prize which would render the latter years of his life comfortable and honourable,—though these years *could* not be very many, and might be very few—if when he did show readiness and perseverance in striving after worldly advancement,

he should yet prove careless, or slothful in striving for the incorruptible crown—the "house not made with hands, eternal, in the Heavens." How immeasurably greater, I say, must such folly appear, to any one who does but reflect on the subject. And yet such is often the folly of those who account themselves, and whom the world accounts, prudent, and thoughtful, and full of foresight. For "the children of this world, are in their generation wiser than the children of light;" *i.e.* worldly men are, in worldly concerns, more provident than the Christian—the child of light, is often found to be, in his. They are provident and wise in what is least, and careless in what is greatest; active in running for a corruptible crown, and slothful in seeking the incorruptible.

Ask yourself then, each one, what race it is that you are running, and how. Ask yourself what it is that you regard as the very best thing that can befall you—the greatest good of all. If you give the reins to your fancy, and think over everything that you would be glad to obtain, it is impossible you can fail to decide that immortal happiness

in your Saviour's presence must be incomparably beyond everything else. And next, ask yourself what good it is that is the most *attainable* by you,—most fully within your *reach*. Some of the earthly goods that will have occurred to you as desirable, you will perceive to be beyond all reasonable hope of attainment by you; some, very unlikely to be attained, though not impossible; some again, such as you have a fair prospect of; but none, that are not uncertain. One good only, and that, by far the greatest,—the "incorruptible crown"—is *promised* you if you duly strive (in the strength which is also promised you) to "run with patience" for it. Of this prize, and this alone, you cannot fail, but through your own fault: in this race alone you can "run not as *uncertainly*."

Resolve therefore now, and renew the resolution daily and hourly, to follow the Apostle's precept—"So run that ye may obtain."

LECTURE X.

The Parable of the Importunate Widow and the Unjust Judge.

LUKE xviii.

AS I observed in the first of these Lectures, any one who reads our Lord's parables with even a moderate degree of attention, cannot but be struck with the extraordinary *variety* of the images that are employed. The Kingdom of Heaven, for example,—*i.e.* the Christian Church,—is compared to a Wedding Feast,—to a net cast into the sea,—to a field of corn,—to the leaven used in fermenting bread,—to a grain of mustard seed, &c. &c. And other subjects also are illustrated by almost an equal variety of images drawn from things the most unlike each other that could be found.

One of the advantages of this variety is, that (as I remarked in that Lecture) we are thus the more likely to be often reminded of the Lessons conveyed; which are in this

way associated with so many familiar objects that surround us in our daily life. The sight of a man sowing in a field,—of a fisherman's net, of a plant springing up from seed, of a house left half-finished for want of means to complete it, and of many other objects that present themselves from time to time, will be sure to remind Christians who have been accustomed to study the Scriptures with real interest, of something that their great Master taught. He has inscribed, as it were, his lessons on almost everything around us.

In particular, the change in a man's character and condition on receiving the Gospel, is described by a great variety of figures: and we should be careful not to imagine that there is any peculiar mystical meaning in any *one* of these, more than in the others. Sometimes it is called a "new-birth" [or "regeneration"] as in 3rd John; or a new *creation* [Eph. iv. 24]. Sometimes it is figured by a resurrection from *death:* "Let the dead," says our Lord, "bury their dead" [Matt. viii. 22]; and "us," says Paul, "hath he quickened [made *alive*] who were dead in trespasses" [Eph. ii. 1-5].

Sometimes it is called giving sight to the *blind*, or bringing *light* into the midst of darkness: "for judgment am I come into the world," says our Lord, "that they who see not may see, and that they who see may be made blind" [John ix. 39]; and again, "I am come a *light* into the world" [John xii. 46]. Sometimes, again, the figure is introduced of a *traveller* taking the right path, which is narrow, and avoiding the "broad road that leadeth to destruction" [Matt. vii. 13-14]: or, of a champion preparing to run a *race* [1 Cor. ix. 24-26]. Very often again Christians are represented as "living *stones*," built up [edified] into a holy Temple [1 Peter ii. 4-5]: and this figure is so often employed that, with us, the word "*edify*" is now used in its figurative sense only.* And very frequently the figure occurs of the "redemption" [or *ransoming*] of a captive from *slavery* [1 Peter i. 18-19]. "The truth," says our Lord, "shall make you *free* [John viii. 32]. And hence He is perpetually spoken of as our *Redeemer*. Sometimes again the recep-

* See Hind's *Three Temples*.

tion of the Gospel is called a *healing* of disease: "They that are whole," says Jesus, "need not a physician, but they that are *sick:* I came not to call the righteous but sinners, to repentance" [Matt. ix. 12-13]. Sometimes, again, it is figured by a supply of food and drink to the *famished* and *thirsty:* "he that drinketh of the water that I shall give him, shall never thirst" [John iv. 14]. "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters" [Isaiah lvi.]. * * * "Labour not for the meat [food] that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life" [John vi. 27]. * * * "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you" [John vi. 53].

Now of these, and other such descriptions, *no* one is true in a *literal* sense;* but, in a

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* A Writer of some note, in citing the passage in which Christians are spoken of as "living stones, built up into a holy temple," observes that "this is giving free-will a stab under the fifth rib; for who ever heard of *stones* building up *themselves?*" And who,—it might be asked in reply,—ever heard of stones that were *living* creatures?

Even a child of ordinary intelligence, if asked why real literal stones cannot build up themselves, would be likely

figurative sense, they are *all* true, and all *equally* true; serving, each one of them, and, still more, all of them together, to convey to us the best notion we are capable of forming, of that which is to be described.

But, besides the *variety* of the images made use of, there is another remarkable circumstance in very many of them; viz. the *remoteness* of them from the objects they represent;—the seemingly studied *un*likeness of the emblem introduced, to the thing signified by it, in every point except the one that is meant to be the essential one.

Thus, for instance, Christians are incited to prudent forethought in their spiritual concerns, by the parable of an *unjust* steward who sought to make a provision for himself by defrauding his master: and the efficacy of persevering prayer is taught, in one place, by the example of a man rising in the night to lend his neighbour three loaves, which he had refused to do till wearied out with his importunity; and in

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to answer, "because they are *not* living Beings." But Christians who are *figuratively* called "stones" and who *are* living, are continually exhorted to build up [edify] themselves and one another.

another place,—that now before us,—by the parable of the Unjust Judge.

"There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not, for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily."*

Of course no one can suppose that in this and other like parables our Lord meant to imply that there is any direct resemblance between our heavenly Father and an unjust judge, or an unkind neighbour; such an idea would be manifestly absurd as well as impious: the resemblance is only in the one point, of earnest and persevering supplica-

* Luke xviii. 2—8.

tion; and even in *that*, the resemblance is only in the *effect*, not in the *cause;* for of course it is not from being literally wearied out by importunity that God hears the petitions of his people: it is only that the effect does take place;—that their prayers, as our Lord assures us, *are* heard.

The same may be said, not only of parables, but of a great number of figurative expressions in Scripture relative to the Most High and his dealings with man. The Sacred Writers employ,—for want of any other,—such language as does not literally and strictly express the things they are speaking of, but only the *effects* produced on *us*. When, for example, we read of the "hand" or the "eyes" of God, &c. the simplest Christian understands at once the meaning to be, not that God has literally hands and eyes and ears, as Man has, but that the *effects* produced bear a resemblance to those which arise from our use of those organs;—that He knows all that is done throughout the world, even as we know (though much more imperfectly) what is passing before our eyes:—that we are under

his controul, even as what we hold in our *hands* is (only in a much less degree) under our controul; and so of the rest.

So also when human passions or thoughts or faculties, are in Scripture attributed to the Most High, this is only in reference to the *effects* produced. We cannot suppose that anger, repentance, or any such feelings can literally exist in Him: but the meaning of such expressions is that men who disregard God's laws will suffer for it, even as the rebellious subjects of an earthly king, who was literally and really angry with them, would suffer from his wrath. And so in other cases. That which is, in itself, good for us to receive, may not be good for us, except when we are filled with the earnest desire for it, coupled with a deep sense of our dependence on God's bounty; which leads to earnest and persevering prayer, and which such prayer, in turn, serves still further to strengthen and confirm; and thus we may become more fit to obtain, and may then obtain, what we have *so* petitioned for; in the same manner as the importunity of the Widow prevailed on the unjust judge:

the *effect* being (as in the other cases alluded to) similar, though the *cause* is widely different.

Still it may seem somewhat strange to many readers, that our Lord should have resorted, as it seems, by choice, to illustrations the most opposite to the thing illustrated;—that He should have chosen the parable not only of a *steward* of worldly goods, but of a *dishonest* steward;—not only of a *human* judge, but of an *unjust* judge. But we may perceive, I think, an especial reason for this selection;—a particular object to be accomplished both by the studied variety of our Lord's illustrations, and the studied *un*likeness in many of them between the emblem and that which it is meant to illustrate. The reader is by this means guarded against false notions which might otherwise take possession of his mind. He is guarded against supposing a *more exact* correspondence between two things, than really exists, or supposing two things to be *in themselves alike*, which in reality are not, but are brought together only because they produce corresponding *effects;* he is guarded, in short, against

forming mistaken theories, and imagining himself to have learnt more of the real nature of the Most High than was really intended to be taught us. All illustrations, all figurative language, metaphors, parables, allegories, &c.—must be open to this danger; and the remedy is to *vary*, as much as possible, the figures employed, and to introduce such as have, in all points except the one in question, the greatest dissimilarity to the thing represented.

To take a familiar instance of this; we are accustomed, in speaking of *Memory*, to use figurative language; (as indeed we always must do in speaking of anything that is not an object of the bodily senses); we often speak of the Memory under the figure of a kind of book or writing-tablet; we speak of things being *impressed*—written —engraved—on the memory; or again, *erased* from the memory. Now the employment of these expressions and these alone, might imperceptibly lead men to fancy that the substance of the brain or heart is actually stamped with certain images or characters of the things we remember. Indeed fanciful theories of

this kind have really been formed. But then again, we often speak of memory under the figure of a *storehouse* or *cabinet;* we speak of things *treasured* up, and retained in the memory,—of a well-stored memory,—and the like. Now this figure serves to correct the other; for as it is plain that the same thing cannot be literally *both* a writing-tablet and a storehouse, we are thus reminded that it is literally neither, and receives those names only by analogy.

The variety then of the figures which our Lord employs in his parables and metaphors makes them serve to limit and correct each other, and guards us against imagining a direct resemblance between things that have none, or a more exact correspondence than really exists. And the same effect is produced by employing figures as remote as possible from the things to be illustrated. If the conduct of a virtuous or even tolerably respectable character had been, in any point, proposed for the imitation of Christ's disciples, they might have been led to consider that character as altogether a model, and to suppose that the motives as well as the conduct were to be entirely approved,

and closely imitated: but they could not make such a mistake when the conduct of an *unjust* steward was set before them. And so also, if the example of a magistrate possessing an ordinary share of uprightness and benevolence had been proposed to them, or even that of one in whom a small spark of pity was kindled by a case of very grievous suffering, they might have supposed more resemblance than really exists, between the feelings and motives of a human governor and of the Most High; but they could not suppose this resemblance between Him and an *unjust* Judge who had no particle of compassion or sense of duty, but merely wished to save himself from being wearied with importunity. They would see at once that our Lord could not be speaking of the causes, but of the effects; —that He could not be comparing the characters themselves, but the results produced.

These remarks appeared to me to be necessary in reference to the *mode* of our Lord's teaching the lesson that is now before us; viz., by parables in which the emblem is so remote from the thing repre-

sented by it, that the reader is disposed at the first glance to wonder why such an illustration should have been selected.

But in respect of the lesson itself that is here inculcated,—the duty of prayer, which our great Master so often and so earnestly insists on,—in respect of this—there is a circumstance which, when we reflect on it, seems to present a difficulty, or at least to suggest inquiry, and call for explanation.

Our Lord's instructions are generally confined to those points in which his hearers most needed *correction*. He dwells on the duties which they were most apt to neglect, and on the errors which prevailed most among them; especially in their narrow interpretation of the Law of Moses, by which they lost sight of the spirit of that Law; as, for instance, in their pretended adherence to the letter of the Third, and of the Seventh commandments, while they justified such profane oaths, and causeless divorces, as violated the spirit of those commandments; and in their limiting the duties towards a *neighbour*, to their friends or their countrymen, instead of regarding

every man to whom they could do a service, as a neighbour.

But in respect of the duty of prayer, there is a remarkable distinction. It was *not* a duty prescribed in the law of Moses; and yet the Jews *did* practise it.

It is very remarkable that throughout the Law delivered by Moses, abounding as it does in the most minute directions as to sacrifices, purifications, and ceremonies of various kinds, and also as to many moral duties, there is no injunction respecting habitual prayer. There is indeed no mention of it except in one short sentence [Deut. xxvi. 15] in which the Israelite in presenting his appointed offering on an occasion occurring but once in three years, is directed to invoke the Lord's blessing on his people.

The reason for omitting the injunction would appear, from the history of the Israelites, to have been, that it was *unnecessary;* for we know that notwithstanding that omission, all those who were at all piously disposed were in the habit of praying. Numerous prayers are incidentally recorded, especially of David and of Solo-

mon; and not to multiply instances which must be so familiar to you, I need only remind you of the high importance which Daniel attached to the regular performance of this duty. And in our Saviour's time and long before, there were synagogues in all parts of the country, closely corresponding to our churches (which indeed are regularly derived from them) in which prayers from written forms (still in use among the Jews) were publicly offered up as regularly as with us. Christ does indeed take occasion to censure some faults into which they had fallen in their prayers; their use of vain repetitions, and their ostentatious and hypocritical display, of what ought to have been their *private* devotions, in the streets and market places. But over and above all that He says on those points, we find Him also earnestly and repeatedly inculcating the duty itself of prayer; although it does not appear that the Jewish People were disposed to neglect it.

Now if they had observed the practice in compliance with the law of Moses, there might have been need to guard them against supposing, hereafter, when that law should

be abolished, that prayer was to be discontinued. But when we find on the contrary that prayer though *not* enjoined by Moses, was practised by the Jews of their own accord, it does seem that our Lord's earnest inculcation of the duty is a remarkable exception to the general character of his teaching.

If it may be permitted to conjecture what were his reasons for this proceeding—for dwelling on a precept which might seem, as far as regarded his immediate hearers, superfluous, I should say that He was probably speaking not so much for *their* sakes, as for *ours*,—*i.e.* for the sake of Christians of later ages of the world, when an alteration, such as He foresaw—in the character of a great part of mankind, would render it needful to let them have assurance on the highest authority, that prayer may prove availing.

There seems little or no need of any such assurance to a gross-minded, unreflecting, half civilized people. To them, prayer is natural and obvious, as soon as ever the belief is but established of the existence of any Being superior to Man, and having

power over us for good or evil. Accordingly, not only the Israelites, as we have seen, were accustomed to pray, without any express command for it, but the ancient heathen (like those of the present day) used to address prayers to their Gods. Simple-minded men, unaccustomed to philosophical speculation, as they naturally apply to a king or other great man for any protection or favour they may stand in need of, apply as naturally to any Being superior to Man, as soon as they are convinced that there is any such Being, capable of hearing and of granting their requests.

And (I may add) they no less naturally are accustomed to address each, very much in *the same manner*. They seek the favour of their human, or super-human patron, alike, by loading him with praises and titles of honour,—by endeavouring to move his compassion,—and by addressing themselves in short, to such feelings as they know to exist in the human breast; and they state and distinctly explain what things they have need of. We learn from the ancient pagan writers that such was of old (as it is now) the style of prayer used by the pagans to

their gods. But we find the most intelligent of those ancient writers expressing their disapprobation or contempt of such addresses to the gods. We find them ridiculing such epithets of praise as were bestowed on those supposed divine Beings, as unworthy of their exalted nature: and censuring the idea of such Beings partaking of human passions, such as love of glory, anger, pity, &c. We find them next blaming men for praying for the goods of fortune, which may not be a real benefit to them; and assuring them that the gods know best what is good for each man to receive; and finally we find a compendious prayer, intended to supersede all other prayers, handed down to us, from a Greek poet, and which has been translated by an English one.

> "Great Jove, this one petition grant;
> Thou knowest best what mortals want;
> Ask'd or unask'd, what's good supply;
> What's evil, to our prayers deny."

Now the writer of this prayer must have supposed it sufficient not only to supersede all *other* prayers, but all habitual use of *any* prayer; since it implies the expectation that Jove will be equally ready whether

asked or unasked, to supply whatever is good for us; so that the practice or omission of prayer must be a matter of total indifference.

And I suppose I need hardly remind you that in all modern civilized countries such sentiments have been found even in men who do believe in a God who governs the world; whereas in barbarian countries, I do not suppose you could find a single instance of the kind. They, as I have said, are no sooner convinced of the existence of a superior Being who governs human concerns, than they naturally apply to him, as they would to a human patron.

It appears then that men left without any express command or revelation on the subject, and following only the workings of their own minds, become gradually less and less disposed to believe in the efficacy of prayer, and consequently to practise it, in proportion as they advance in intellect, and in habits of reflection. It is needless, they are apt to say, to state our wants, to one who knows them better than ourselves; it is presumptuous for *us* to pretend to decide what things are fitting for us to receive: it

is hopeless to think of changing, by our solicitations, the decrees of One who regulates the universe; it is profane to attribute to Him those human feelings to which we address ourselves when applying to human patrons: in short, in proportion as they come to reflect how great is the difference between a divine Being and any human patron whom we are accustomed to petition, they are apt to come to the conclusion that all petitions to God are useless.

I am speaking, you will observe, not of the *reasonableness* or unreasonableness of such conclusions, but of their *existence*, as a matter of *fact*.

I shall not enter at large on the former of these questions; namely: how far a man, guided only by the light of nature, and having no divine revelation or command on the subject, would have good reason for the practice of prayer, and for belief in its efficacy. I will only remark that the argument drawn from the all-wise decrees of the Most High, which, it is urged, cannot be altered by our supplications, would go to prove that our *conduct* must be as much a

matter of indifference as our prayers. For if we believe Him to have fixed such decrees as are here supposed, and which are independent of anything we can *say*, they must be equally independent of anything we can *do;* so that on this view, virtuous and vicious behaviour would be of no consequence in reference to the divine favour. But we have no reason for believing that God does govern according to any such decrees independent of what is said and done by Man. And if we believe his decree to be that "in every nation" (as the Apostle Peter says) "he that feareth God and worketh righteousness, is accepted of Him," we may equally well believe that He has decreed to be a "rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," and not, of those who will *not* seek Him. As He foresees *all* events, all causes and all effects throughout the universe, so, our prayers, as well as all other acts of ours, must be foreseen by Him. And accordingly our Lord concludes this very parable with a promise that "God will avenge his own elect, who call day and night upon Him." But if those who are elected [chosen] to be God's People (as the

Israelites were, of old) and to enjoy great advantages and privileges*—if any of these should fail to "give all diligence to make their calling and election sure," they would be cast off, as the generation of perverse Israelites were, in the Wilderness. If they should neglect to "call upon God," He would not come to their aid. For such is the account He gives of his dealings with Man.†

Still we could not have had, by the light of Natural Religion alone, a sufficiently strong assurance of the efficacy of prayer to induce us heartily to practise it,—"to come boldly to the Throne of Grace (as Paul says) in full assurance of faith," if we had not received an express direction to that effect from divine authority. This point our Lord has decided, by *not* leaving us in this matter to the light of Reason, but giving us express commands and promises. And again He has assured us, both Himself and by his Apostles, that we may apply to the Father in his name—"hitherto have ye asked

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* See Essay iii. 2nd series.

† See Note at the end of this Lecture.

nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full." We are to ask through the intercession of One who though exempt from human faults and follies, is no stranger to human feelings: "for we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." And *having* those commands and promises, reason clearly points out that we ought to rely on them. Our Lord's commands indeed, even independently of his *promises*, would lead us to believe in the efficacy of prayer: for his express command *makes prayer* a part of our *duty*,—a point of obedience; and it is surely nothing derogatory to the divine wisdom and greatness to believe that God will deal with us according as we perform our duty, and that obedience will better fit us for receiving his bounty than disobedience.

It has been my endeavour to call your attention to the admirable manner in which our Lord adapted his precepts not merely to his immediate hearers, but also to those in a later and considerably different state

of society. He knew not only what was in Man, but what *would* be in Man in after ages. Foreseeing that prayer would become hereafter a much greater effort of *faith* than it is among a half civilized and unreflecting people, He laid a foundation for that faith to rest on, in his commands —his earnest exhortations, and his assurances. At the same time, to guard us against any erroneous notions mixed up with our faith, He has warned us (in this parable) that the promised efficacy of prayer to God, does not depend on *his* having such human infirmities as may often give efficacy to our petitions to a fellow-mortal—by employing in his illustration the figure not of a (humanly speaking) good magistrate;—but of an *unjust* judge, a character which every one must at once perceive cannot in itself at all resemble our heavenly Father. So that we are guarded against speculative error, while we are receiving practical instruction.

And now let me remind you in conclusion that He who has given those precepts and those promises, and has assured us

that He "will come unto those that keep his saying, and make his abode with them," He, that same Lord,—is by his Spirit —his "Spirit which maketh intercession for us,"—He is especially present in a place of worship; for "Wheresoever," He says, "two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them:" and He has added that if even "two or three shall *agree* touching something that they shall ask in his name" (supposing it, of course, something not in itself unfit for them to receive), "it shall be granted them."

Let us then now agree in an earnest though silent petition for an increase of faith in our great Master and in his declarations and promises, and for an increased and increasing disposition towards pure and sincere and fervent devotion — the worship of God, according to his injunction —"in Spirit and in truth."

NOTE, REFERRED TO AT PAGE 221.

It is to be observed that the doctrine called by some the "fatalist" system, by some the "necessarian," or "predestinarian," is quite harmless, because quite inoperative, if maintained *throughout*, but practically dangerous, if held *partially*. It may be compared to what is called the

pressure of the Atmosphere; which, as long as it is *general*, and *equable*, is unfelt; but produces violent effects when the pressure is withdrawn from some part. The air presses the human body with a weight of many thousand pounds; but as it presses upwards and downwards, inwards and outwards, and on all sides alike, it does not incommode us. When however the pressure is removed from some part,—as by a cupping-glass,—the effect on the adjacent parts is strongly felt. Even so, any Fatalist who holds—as he must, if he be thoughtful and clear-headed—that *all* things are equally fated,—the means as well as the ends—will be likely to hold his doctrine as purely speculative, and not at all influencing practice. But one who holds (as the vulgar are likely to do) that *some* things are fated, and some, *not*, will be in danger of most important errors in practice.

Let any one be convinced that he who is predestined to thrive, is predestined to be industrious and careful: that a farmer who is fated to be unskilful and idle, is fated to have bad crops; that a man who is fated to commit a crime, is fated to suffer the penalty of it; and that every one who is predestined to receive at the last day the "crown of righteousness," is predestined to "run with patience the race set before him," and to "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling;"—let any one hold this, and he will be likely to act, in all things, just as if he had never thought at all about the question. But if any one holds—as it seems the Mahometans do, a *partial* predestination, reckoning *some* things to be fated, but not all,—the ends, but not the means, then,—the *atmospheric pressure*, as it were, of necessity, being withdrawn from some points and not from others,—the doctrine will, to him, be practical and mischievous. Mahomet taught that the men who were slain in a certain battle had their deaths decreed; but then he said, not that they were fated *to go* to the battle, but that *if they had stayed at home* they would have died at the very same time. And accordingly his followers neglect precautions against the

plague, and against fires, and make their doctrine of predestination a plea for the grossest negligence in all things. And some christian Writers teach much the same doctrine as Mahomet's; as you may see from some specimens which I have appended to Lect. iv. p. 114.

No one, it is true, could, in ordinary life completely carry out in practice such a theory as Mahomet's; since he could not thus live a week. For he would not move out of the way of a carriage, or of a rising tide; but would say, "if it is decreed that I am to be crushed, or to be drowned, no precautions will save me; and if I am predestined to escape, nothing can destroy me." But though no one acts on such a system throughout, it is one which may often add force to the temptations of indolence, or of passion; as is seen, in the conduct of the Mahometans.

Some persons however, not deficient in good sense on other points, imagine themselves to derive from this doctrine a consolatory satisfaction, which they in fact feel (and perhaps not without reason), but the real grounds of which they mis-state. The doctrine that *some* persons are elected absolutely to final salvation, they confound with the belief—a highly consolatory one, no doubt—that they *themselves* are of the number. But as long as any decree is (as our 17th Article expresses it), "nobis arcanum,"—*secret* to *us*, we have no more satisfactory certainty than if no such decree had existed. Our knowledge or belief that any event—no matter whether past, present, or future—is *fixed*, leaves it still a contingency to *us*, till we know in *what way* it is fixed. Suppose for instance a man knows that a law-cause on which his whole property depends was decided yesterday at some distant place; if he expressed his satisfaction in this knowledge, you might ask him why he should be rejoiced to know that he is *either* secured from loss, *or else* ruined. He would probably reply by dwelling on the goodness of his cause, the ability of his Advocate, and the uprightness and wisdom of the Judge. "But then you mistake," it might be answered, "the ground of your satisfaction: for all these circumstances

are what you were equally aware of the day *before* the trial came on: and it is on *these*, and on the consequent belief in a *favourable* decision, that your satisfaction is really founded; not, on the mere knowledge that *some* decision has been made which is "secret to us."

Accordingly the consolation and satisfaction described in the 17th Article as flowing from the predestinarian doctrine, is expressly limited to those "godly persons" who "feel in themselves the workings of Christ's Spirit," and who live and act conformably: so that it is plain the real source of their satisfaction, is, not the mere belief that *some* persons will assuredly be saved, but their trust that they *themselves* are of that number. And it may be added that *any* one who does feel this consciousness of a christian heart and life, and who trusts fully in the promises of God as they "be *generally* set forth in holy Scripture," may equally enjoy the very same satisfaction, even without having ever thought at all about any predestinarian controversies.

LECTURE XI.

The Parable of the Unjust Steward.

THIS is one of the parables in which—as in that of the importunate widow—the thing chosen to afford a figure for our instruction is most strikingly *unlike* that which it is intended to represent, in every point except the one which is essential to the comparison. No one can suppose that our Heavenly Father is really of a character resembling that of an unjust judge; or that Christians are intended to be of the character of an unjust steward; but only, to take pattern from his prudent forethought.

It is probable that this is one of those parables of our Lord in which He slightly and darkly hints at that which was to be fully and clearly revealed a few years later, —the call of the Gentiles to be partakers of the same privileges with the Jews; and that the Jewish nation, which was to be no longer the only People of God, are repre-

sented in the parable by the Steward who was dismissed from his office. The Debtors, I conceive, represent the Gentiles, among whom, by Jewish missionaries, remission of sins was to be preached.

But the parable has also, evidently, a general and personal application to all individual men; who are admonished, by the example of the Steward, to "lay up for themselves treasure in Heaven;"—to make such a use of all their worldly possessions as to provide for their eternal welfare, that they may be "received into [the] everlasting habitations."*

The Steward is represented as seeking favour and support from his master's debtors by combining with them in a scheme of fraud: and we read that his master "commended the unjust Steward because he had done wisely:" or rather (according to the more exact rendering of the Original), "gave commendation to the prudence which he had shown:" that is, while, of course, con-

* I have inserted the Article, in conformity to the Original.

demning his dishonesty, giving him credit for sagacity.

And then our Lord proceeds to remark that "the children of this world, are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light;" that is, that worldly men show in worldly concerns, more prudent forethought than Christians do, in what regards religious concerns. But by "the children of this world" I think we should understand not merely such as are usually considered as "worldly men"—persons wholly devoted to the things of this present life,—but *all* men, so far as they are occupied (as every one *must* be, in some degree) in matters relating to this world. In these, men in general show a prudence and forethought and diligence far beyond what is generally shown in all that pertains to Religion.

Accordingly, not only may ungodly men furnish, in this way, a useful lesson to the Christian in his religious concerns, but *every* one may supply this kind of lesson to himself, and take pattern, in his conduct as a Christian, from what he himself does in worldly matters. Consider how you act,

or would be likely to act, or would think it prudent to act, in such and such temporal transactions; and then consider whether you are equally thoughtful and equally wise, in what concerns your eternal welfare: and if not, whether you are not failing to profit by what may be called your *own* example;—whether you are not neglecting the instruction which the parable, as it were, of every-day life might afford.

Suppose, for instance, that you held a stewardship or some other such situation which supported you, and that you received notice that you were very shortly to be deprived of it. You would think it but a matter of common prudence to consider how to provide for yourself for the rest of your life. Of course you would not, if you were honest, resort to any such scheme of fraud for your future maintenance as that of the unjust Steward in the parable. But *some* plan you would certainly endeavour to form, to prevent, if possible, your being cast forth as a destitute beggar. You would reckon it the height of folly for a man so circumstanced to be utterly careless of the future,

and to think only of living in ease and enjoyment during the few days of his continuing in office. Now each one of us is actually in a condition answering to that of a man about to be deprived of his office, and called on to give an account of his stewardship. This life, and all that we possess in it, is our stewardship, which we must very shortly give up, and render an account of all that we have done, or failed to do;—of all the advantages and opportunities entrusted to us, and of our use or neglect of them. And yet one may meet with not a few whom the world accounts provident, careful, shrewd, and calculating; and who are so, with respect to worldly affairs, but who never think — or never think to any good purpose—of providing for eternity, — of taking any care about being "received into the everlasting habitations;" and this, though they cannot but know that the whole of even the longest life on earth is incalculably less in comparison of eternity, than the few days of a steward's remaining in the office he has been warned to quit, are, in comparison of the remainder of his life. Even thus

are "the children of this world wiser in their generation" than the children of light!"

Again, suppose you saw on the sea shore a number of persons who were well aware that the tide was coming in, and would very soon cover the place where they were standing: you would not doubt that they would all retreat speedily to a place out of reach of the waters. But if you saw that on the contrary most of them remained carelessly roaming about and amusing themselves with gathering shells and shining pebbles, and if you found that when reminded of their danger, some of them comforted themselves with the thought that they were no worse off than their neighbours, or trusted that they should somehow be saved, though they could not well say how, or declared that they did design to fly from the danger some time hence, when they should find the waves just dashing up to their feet,—if you saw people acting thus absurdly in such a case, you would account them not foolish merely, but absolutely mad. And yet you know but too well how common it is for men to act thus with respect to far more important

concerns. When well knowing that the vast ocean of eternity is before them, and that this present life is like a spot of sand that will shortly be covered with the waves, they act as if there were no life but the present, and as if it were to last for ever. Instead of making any provision for another world, they are occupied, as it were, in picking up pebbles and shells;—devoted to the gratifications or the gains of this world,—and thoughtless about that future which is so soon to arrive.

Again, if you saw men selling their most valuable property for the most trifling baubles, which they *knew* to be comparatively worthless, you would account them not foolish merely, but complete idiots. And yet how regardless they often are of our Lord's warning, "What would it profit a man if he should gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

Very unwise, no doubt, some men are, in their worldly concerns; but any one who should act *as* absurdly in these, as many Christians do in what relates to their eternal salvation, would be accounted unfit to take care of himself, and placed under restraint.

And it may safely be laid down that great as are the imprudences which men often do commit in all matters, yet, on the whole, if they were but *as* prudent and thoughtful in their christian course as every one of common sense is in worldly matters,—as the "children of this world are, in their generation"—the christian world would be far different from what it is.

But mere prudent calculation will not suffice to make men provide for their "everlasting habitations:" else we should not see such gross folly often committed, as I have been speaking of, by men who are shrewd and intelligent and careful in their worldly concerns. When therefore you have satisfied your own mind,—when your reason is fully convinced—as to what it is on which your eternal welfare depends, you must not conclude that this is enough, and that you will be sure to act accordingly. You must pray that God will by his Holy Spirit inspire you with such *gratitude* towards Him for all He has done for you, such *love* towards your Redeemer, such delight in conformity to his commands and to his example, and such detestation of sin as odious in his sight, as

will enable you to lead that life which your reason tells you the Christian ought to lead, but in which the mere calculations of reason would not be sufficient to keep you steady. So, and so only, can you be received into the "everlasting habitations," which though not merited by anything done by us, are provided by the goodness of our divine Master for his faithful servants.

LECTURE XII.

The Parable of Abraham's preparing to sacrifice his Son.

THE transaction recorded in the 22nd chapter of Genesis — Abraham's receiving a command to sacrifice Isaac, and offering up a brute-victim as a substitute, is one of those that may be called *acted parables*, of which there are several recorded in Scripture. But in the narrative in Genesis there is no mention made of its being at all of the nature of a parable. And it is partly for that very reason that I wish to call your attention to it. For, many persons overlook the full significancy of the transaction, although we are expressly taught in the Epistle to the Hebrews [chapter 11] that it does bear the character of a parable.

We there read that "By faith Abraham when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said,

that in Isaac shall thy seed be called; accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead; from whence also he received him again, in a figure." [Parabolè in the Original: *i.e.* a Parable.]

We have, set before us, in this portion of the Epistle, several instances of eminent faith, as an example and encouragement. By faith, you will observe, is meant, in this place, not (what the word sometimes denotes) some particular system of doctrines, not this or that particular belief, but, firm confidence, generally, in whatever God may have declared or promised. For, it is plain that the faith, [in the sense of belief], of Enoch and others who lived before the Mosaic Law was revealed, and that of persons who lived under that Law, and that again, of such as had heard and embraced the Gospel, must have been widely different. But the moral quality of faith,—that is, confident and obedient reliance on God,—was the same in all of them.

And accordingly the writer of this Epistle does not profess to determine what was the amount of knowledge, and what the belief, of Enoch; but merely infers from his having

this testimony, that he "pleased God," that he must have possessed faith in the sense here spoken of; "for he" (says he) "that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."

Of all the instances of faith that are recorded in this portion of the Epistle, Abraham's is—to us—far the most important; because it does not merely—like the others—furnish us with an example for imitation, but it also relates to a most important transaction,—to an event which concerns, in the highest degree, all mankind. For, that the designed and prepared sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah was a type prefiguring the actual sacrifice, in the very same place, of his descendant Jesus Christ, is almost universally acknowledged by Christians.

But with regard to the command itself that was given to Abraham, and the faith which he then displayed,—on this, some Christians have but an indistinct and imperfect notion; and in some minds there is a total misapprehension of the whole case.

For there are some persons,—not, generally, destitute of intelligence, nor of ac-

quaintance with Scripture,—who consider the command given to Abraham as, simply, a command given *to a man* (as it might, conceivably, have been, to Adam, or to Noah, or Moses, or any other man) to sacrifice his son. And accordingly infidels have suggested that this transaction may have been the origin, or at least an encouragement, of the practice of some Pagan nations of offering human sacrifices, as if from a tradition that such a sacrifice might, sometimes at least, be acceptable.

But there is a circumstance, most strangely overlooked by these persons, which makes the two cases, of such a command being given to any ordinary man, and to Abraham, not only quite different, but even opposite. If any other man had received a command to sacrifice his son, he would naturally understand that he was to part with that son totally and finally. Whereas Abraham understood the very reverse; since he had already received an assurance that the posterity of Isaac was to become a great nation. A reader of any moderate degree of attention might have perceived the real state of the case even

from the Book of Genesis alone. But moreover the passage in Hebrews points out and dwells on the very circumstance: "he that had *received the promises* offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said that *in Isaac shall thy seed be called*, accounting that God was able to *raise him up* even from the dead."

The trial of Abraham, evidently consisted in this; that he had received a command seemingly inconsistent with the promise; and his faith was shown in his continuing steadily to trust in that promise, notwithstanding; firmly convinced that God would find some way—though he could not see how—of reconciling the two. He was convinced that he was *not* to be finally deprived of his son; and in the conviction that Isaac would be in some way or other restored to him, it was, that his eminent faith consisted.

The Apostle goes on to say, that he did "receive Isaac from the dead, in a figure;" —in a *parable*, according to the Original; for the word is the same that is always elsewhere rendered "parable." By a parable is meant an emblem, figure, or repre-

sentation of one thing by another; as, for example, seed sown, in one of our Lord's parables, represents the Word of God, and the sower, the preacher; and so of the rest. In this case, the binding of Isaac, and the lifting up of the knife over him, may be considered as a figure or parable representing his being actually put to death; and his release, as a representation of his being raised from the dead. But I have no doubt that, besides this, there was presented to Abraham, on this occasion, another, and far more important, representation of what was afterwards to take place. I have no doubt that the death and resurrection of Isaac's descendant Jesus Christ was emblematically represented to Abraham on this occasion; and that the signification of this figure [or parable] was then explained to him. This we may infer from the assurance we have received that he "saw the day" of Jesus Christ. "Your father Abraham," says our Lord, "rejoiced to see my day:" the word "rejoiced," however, should have been "eagerly desired;" for that is the right sense of the Original; and the whole passage will then be made con-

sistent, and will not contain a superfluous repetition of the same sense expressed in the words "rejoiced" and "was glad." "Your father Abraham eagerly desired to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad." Hence we learn (what the Book of Genesis does not record) that Abraham not only had the coming of Christ revealed to him, but that he, in some way, *saw* it;—that some representation of it was exhibited before his eyes. And the occasion on which this was done, and the manner of it, must be found, in all probability, in the transaction now before us.

The mode of conveying knowledge by means of an acted parable,—by exhibiting, that is, to the eyes, some object or action, and then explaining that this is a symbol or representation of something else,—was so frequent in ancient times that many instances of it will readily occur to any one accustomed to read the Bible with attention. For example, we read of a prophet taking Jeroboam's robe and rending it into twelve pieces, of which he handed ten to Jeroboam, telling him at the same time that this represented the rending asunder the king-

dom of Israel, and assigning the dominion over ten tribes to Jeroboam. And many other instances might be given.

That the transaction now before us was one of them, there can hardly be a doubt. Abraham, we must suppose, had it explained to him that the act he had been performing, of binding his beloved son, and laying him on the altar ready to be slain, was a figure or parable, of the actual sacrifice, in that very place, of the Son of God; and that the release and restoration to him of his son, thus delivered from death, represented the actual resurrection from the dead of the Christ Himself. And the words which Abraham himself had uttered just before, were doubtless explained to him as containing a prophetical meaning of which he had been unconscious. In answer to Isaac's inquiry "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham had replied, "My son, *God* will provide Himself a Lamb for a burnt offering." That this was to be fulfilled in the true "Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world," was, no

he made a kind of record in the name he gave to that place, of "Jehovah Jireh," that is, "the Lord will provide."

It was also probably indicated to Abraham, that he must on this occasion offer up a sacrifice of a slain beast, opportunely ready, a ram caught in a thicket by the horns; "and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." This, no doubt, represented, — and was so explained to Abraham,—the sacrifices appointed under the Levitical Law, which were designed,— as is very fully set forth in this very Epistle, as types prefiguring the sacrifice of Christ.

But why is it,—some may perhaps be disposed to ask,—that of all this revelation to Abraham, there is no mention at all made in the narrative of the transaction given in Genesis? We there have presented to us a picture of perfect faith, and submission to the divine will; but nothing is said of the significancy,—the instruction by a figure,— conveyed in this transaction to Abraham. It was promised to him that "in his

seed should all nations of the earth be blessed;" but *what* that blessing was to be, and how procured, the Book does not tell us.

The answer to such inquiries is evident. It is, that Moses had no commission to preach the *Gospel*. And if he had recorded the revelation which we have supposed was on this occasion made to Abraham, he would have been revealing to the Israelites, before the appointed time, the very Gospel of Jesus Christ.

That the blessing which should be to all nations through the seed of Abraham, should be the coming of Christ, a descendant, after the flesh, of Abraham, and of Isaac, and that He should be offered up as a sacrifice for Man's redemption, and should rise from the dead as a pledge of his having purchased for his faithful followers a resurrection to life immortal,—all this, if revealed, as we may be assured it was, to Abraham when he "saw the day of Christ and was glad," could not have been recorded by Moses for the use of all the People, without forestalling, to all of them, the revelation which was to be made when the fulness of

Time should arrive, of the whole christian Dispensation.

To Abraham, and probably to Moses himself, and a few others of the most highly-favoured servants of God of old, that revelation *was* thus forestalled; but certainly not, to the Nation at large. Our Saviour's own declaration that "*Abraham* saw his day and was glad," would even of itself imply that the great Body of the Israelites were *not* favoured with that sight.

And this distinction seems implied in our 7th Article, which declares that the "Old Testament is not contrary to the New, but that in both, everlasting life is offered to Mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and Men: and that those are not to be listened to who teach that the old Fathers did look only for transitory promises."

By the old Fathers, are meant, no doubt, Abraham and other such eminent Patriarchs and Prophets as I have just been alluding to; not, the whole nation of Israel. To them, Moses, as he was commanded, delivered the Law; in which certainly the doctrine of salvation through Jesus Christ

is not taught:—not taught, that is, in such a manner as to be understood by the great Body of the People who were required to conform to that Law.

In the Books of Moses, we find page after page filled with the most ample and lively descriptions of temporal blessings and afflictions, to be awarded to the Israelites according as they should obey or disobey the Lord's commandments; and nothing (at the utmost) beyond the most slight and faint and rare allusions to a future state. And indeed if he *had* taught them that eternal life could be earned by strict obedience to the Levitical Law, or obtained in any other way than through Christ's redemption, he would have taught them what was not true. Or if again he had taught them that redemption, he would have been preaching to them that Gospel which, in fact, was, when the tidings of it did arrive, so unexpected and startling to the whole nation. It would have been Moses, and not (as we are assured) Jesus Christ, that "brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

The Law did indeed contain "a shadow

of good things to come;" but it was a shadow which did not make known "the very image of those things," till explained by the actual coming of the reality. There was not indeed between the Old Dispensation and the New, any change of purpose in the Most High; but there was a great change in the knowledge imparted to his People. Jesus Christ was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," in the divine counsels, but not, in the revelations made to Man. The Old Testament is not (as our Article expresses it) contrary to the New, but contained in a hidden and undeveloped state, the mystery which the New unfolded and brought to light. It contained the Gospel, in the same way that a future fruit is contained in the blossom; from which no one without experience, could have learned what would be the fruit that is to succeed it. The Levitical sacrifices were,—like the offering up of Isaac,—figures or acted parables, representing the sacrifice of Christ; but with this difference; that the signification of the parable was, to the great Body of the Israelites, left unexplained and

hidden; to Abraham the meaning of the figure was revealed, and "*he* saw the day of Jesus Christ, and was glad."

Why it was that this imperfect and preparatory Revelation was given through Moses,—why he was not commanded to anticipate the preaching of the Gospel,—and indeed why the Christ did not come into the world many ages before He did,—all this is what no prophet, no Evangelist, no Apostle has told us. And therefore for us to hazard conjectures, or make inquiries, as to the reasons of God's dealings with Man, would be a sinful presumption. It would be still greater presumption to undertake—as some do—not only to make, but to *answer*, such inquiries. Let no one seduce you, my christian friends, into seeking to know more of the divine counsels than the Apostles knew; or at least, more than they were permitted to tell us;—to understand what was either concealed *from* them, or, under divine command, concealed *by* them.

There is nothing, you should remember, in the whole scheme of our religion, that can appear more inexplicable and strange

to *us*, than the command given to Abraham to sacrifice his son, must have appeared to him. And if he had thereupon set himself to inquire into the reasons of such a command, he would not have obtained the blessing pronounced on him. But instead of indulging in vain and presumptuous speculations, he acquiesced, in humble faith; and,—with truthful and childlike submission,—prepared to obey. And it is his example that is proposed for our imitation.

One advantage however we may derive from what is plainly set before us in the Mosaic Dispensation. We may perceive, in the very imperfectness of the revelation it contains, a proof of its coming from God. For, Moses holding forth only temporal blessings and temporal judgments as the sanction of his Law, taught the People that these were to be awarded to them according to an extraordinary,—*i. e.* miraculous—dispensation of Providence; and appealed to their own knowledge that this regular dispensation of goods and evils did actually, in their case, take place. For instance [Deut. iv. 4], "Your eyes have seen what the Lord did because of Baal-Peor; for,

all the men that followed Baal-Peor the Lord thy God hath destroyed them from among you. But ye that did cleave unto the Lord your God, are alive every one of you this day." And there are a multitude of like appeals to their own experience.

Now had Moses been a false pretender, he would have known that he could not secure the constant *fulfilment* of his promises and threats. And his imposture would have been detected, when men found that they were *not* regularly rewarded and punished according as they obeyed, or disobeyed his Law. We may be sure therefore that a crafty impostor would not have trusted entirely to promises and threats of temporal goods and evils alone. He would doubtless have taught the Israelites to look for a state of future retribution also; which was done by the ancient heathen lawgivers. Many of these probably did not believe in what they taught about Elysium and Tartarus: but they judged it wise to try to make their people believe it, for the sake of keeping them in awe. And they knew that the falsity of their promises and threats

respecting *another world* could not be detected by *experience*.

And Moses, no doubt, would have proceeded in the same manner, had he been a pretender. But he was fully convinced that the Israelites really did live under that miraculous Providence which he described. And their own experience taught them that what he said was true.

We have here then a distinct internal proof, in the Mosaic Dispensation, of its divine origin, from the very circumstance which some infidels have alleged as an objection, its incompleteness as a revelation; —its omission of the doctrine of retribution in another world. It is next to impossible that any mere man, left to himself, would ever have thought of devising such a system; and if he *had* made the attempt, he would inevitably have failed to establish it.

Abraham was, as we have seen, favoured with a fuller revelation than the great Body of the Israelites. But this revelation to him, we should remember, was not the *foundation* of his faith, but the *reward* of it. The reasons of the seemingly strange

and hard command given him, were not explained to him *before*, but *after* he had obeyed it. His faith and his obedience were put to the test, first; and then he was permitted to "see the day of Christ Jesus; and he saw it and was glad."

The Apostle Paul accordingly cites Abraham as an example of the efficacy of faith, and James, of the efficacy of works. "Abraham," says Paul, "believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness:" and again, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises, offered up his only-begotten Son, of whom it was said that in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him even from the dead; from whence also he received him, in a figure." And "was not Abraham our Father," says James,* "justified by works, when he had offered up Isaac his Son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God,

* James ii. 21.

and it was imputed to him for righteousness; and he was called the friend of God."

And here it may be worth remarking by the way, that in our translation and also in our 11th Article, it would have been more correct, and more conformable to the original expressions of the Sacred Writers, instead of the words "*by* faith," to say, "*through* faith." Strictly speaking, a man is not justified, nor can obtain salvation, either *by* faith or *by* works. Faith is required of him, and so are good works;—but if either, or both of these, could be the efficient cause of justification before God, and of final salvation, he would be justified and saved by *himself;* since the faith and obedience that are required of any one, must be *his own* faith and obedience. But it is by God's free mercy in Christ, and that only, that we can be saved. Faith is only (as some have rightly expressed it) the *hand* with which we lay hold of God's offers; and obedience is the necessary fruit of real christian faith. "By grace," says Paul [Ephes. ii. 8,] are ye saved, *through* faith; and that, not of yourselves, it is the gift of God."

It is really something strange, that some persons should have found a difficulty in reconciling Paul's doctrine with that of James. They must surely have a most confused and incorrect notion of both. For James is manifestly speaking in disparagement of that faith which consists in mere intellectual belief. "Thou believest," says he, "that there is one God: thou doest well; the Demons also believe and tremble." Now can any one really suppose that the saving faith insisted on by Paul was this faith of Demons? Or again, can it be believed that James, when speaking of works, meant mere *outward acts*, without any reference to the inward motive,—the faith from which they spring? And this, when He expressly says, "I will show thee my faith by my works?"

If any one had suggested to this Apostle such an interpretation of his words, he might have refuted the error exactly in the way he does refute the one he is opposing. He might have said, "It is a good thing to proclaim Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God: to do so is a good work; the Demons whom Jesus cast out did this; they

found themselves compelled to cry out, "'I know thee who thou art, the Holy One of God :' but this did not make them acceptable before God; for, works good in themselves, but not done from a good motive, are as much the *works* of Demons, as mere intellectual faith is the *faith* of Demons."

If any one then should ask whether we are to be justified partly through faith and partly through works, I should reply that the question is as idle a one as if he should ask concerning a house which has been destroyed by fire, whether the conflagration was to be attributed to the wood, and other combustible substances within it, or to the firebrand which fell on them; or partly to the one, and partly to the other. We all know that no quantity of combustibles could at all contribute to the breaking out of a fire, if no spark fell on them; and again, that a firebrand, if it fell on a stone pavement, would produce no effect at all. And in like manner, in this case, neither a faith which does not show itself in obedience, nor again, good works which do not spring from faith, can go one step towards

recommending any one to God; but only as the Apostle expresses it, "faith which *worketh* by love."

If then you would know whether in Abraham's place you would have displayed a faith like his—such faith as is required of *us* for the attainment of the Gospel promises, observe whether your faith, like his, leads to obedience. If he had professed to believe God's word, and to love and reverence Him, but had refused or neglected to fulfil the command given him, he would not have inherited the blessing he received. And even so our Lord tells us, "he that keepeth my commandments, he it is that loveth me." And one of his commandments (let me once more remind you) is to keep the feast on that sacrifice of Himself which was foreshown to Abraham, by partaking, in remembrance of Him, of the symbols of his body broken, and his blood shed for us. Christians who neglect on one pretence or other, to fulfil this their Master's last injunction, yet profess to trust in Him for salvation, are acting as Abraham would have done, if instead of readily setting himself to obey the (much harder) injunction

given him, he had framed excuses and made empty professions.

Let me in conclusion, again remind you not to measure the amount of faith by the extent of *knowledge*,—or supposed knowledge,—concerning heavenly things. For, on the contrary, faith is called for rather by our ignorance,—by our deficiency of knowledge,—than by the knowledge we possess. "Faith," says the very Epistle before us, "is the substance [or ground, or confidence] of things hoped for; the evidence of things *not* seen:" and again, "We walk," says Paul, "by faith and not by sight." Where we clearly see, *there* there is no room for faith. *Some* knowledge indeed there must be, as a foundation for any intelligent faith to stand on. For, in order to obey God's commands, we must be convinced that there *is* a God, and must know *what* his commands are. But the faith itself as distinguished from the basis on which it rests, consists in believing, on God's word, what we *cannot* explain; and doing what He commands, when we do not see the reason of his commands. Abraham had received plain proof that the Lord communicated to him

his commands; and he knew *that* most startling and apparently inconsistent command, to sacrifice his son; but he knew not what was to be the result of his compliance with this command: if he *had* known it, there would have been no trial of his faith,—no virtue in his compliance. And thence it was that his faith, and his obedience, were richly rewarded, and were held up to us as an example.

Now we know no more why the death of Jesus Christ was necessary for Man's redemption—at least our Scriptures teach us no more—than Abraham knew, or could conjecture, why he received that command. Be it our part to imitate his humility, and his trust in God, and his unhesitating compliance with the divine will. And let us hope that we shall, like him, receive, hereafter, in a future state, explanations and information that are now (for wise reasons, no doubt) kept back from us.

And as it would be highly presumptuous for any of us to pretend to decide—where God has not revealed it—what are his reasons for such and such of his dealings with Man, so, it is no less presumptuous

(though this is what men often overlook) to pronounce boldly that He *had no reasons* at all, but acted so and so to manifest what they call the divine "*sovereignty;*" which is just what is called, in any human Being, acting from *caprice*, and on no rational grounds: or to set forth his own "glory;" as if He could really covet glory! Abraham doubtless trusted that there *was* some good reason, hidden from him, for the seemingly strange command he had received. He did not presume either to demand an explanation of that reason, or, again, to pronounce that there *was* none. And he was afterwards rewarded by being shown the reason.

And this kind of modest submission is often required of us even towards an earthly Superior. If a king, for instance, in the exercise of his lawful prerogative, issues some command "of his own mere motion," (as the phrase is) no one has a right to call him to account for it, and demand his reasons; but it would be very rash to infer that he *had* no reason at all, because he is not bound to declare what it is. And how infinitely more rash for us, ignorant

mortals, to pronounce in some case where the just and all-wise God has merely declared that so and so is his *will*, that therefore He had no reason for it except his Will! which is, in fact, saying that He acted from caprice. Yet this, which is, in truth, the height of presumption, is what some mistake for humility, and for an exaltation of God's glory!

You may however meet with persons (for such there are) who offer pretended explanations of what Scripture tells us *without* explanation;—who frame theories to account for the whole scheme of Man's redemption through Christ, and profess to show why it took place in that particular manner, and why no other was possible. But consider well whether it is humble piety or profane presumption, thus to undertake to go beyond the Evangelists and Apostles, and to supply the deficiencies of their teaching. And consider also how much danger, to many minds, such rash attempts may bring. For, when any such theory is brought forward to explain some christian doctrine, and is found to be (what an intelligent man will perceive it to be) utterly weak and unsatisfactory,

many a one will conclude that the overthrow of this theory amounts to a disproof of the doctrine; and perhaps of Christianity altogether. An appeal having been made to his own judgment, to decide whether the doctrine in question is conformable to the deductions of his own reason, then, if he find that it is not,—that the explanation of it, which has been offered, is futile,—he will be not unlikely to reject the whole. And thus not only will unbelievers obtain a seeming triumph, but others may be even *led* into unbelief.

And those again who do feel satisfied with such explanations of God's plans, should be reminded that at least they have not, on that ground, any claim to pre-eminence in the virtue of faith, but rather the reverse. He who in a dark night at sea, believes,—*on the Pilot's word*,—that the vessel is approaching land, shows more faith in that Pilot than one who sees,—or fancies he sees—the land before him. *You* believe, he would say, that you have the land in sight: *I* am convinced that you are gazing on a fog-bank, which your fancy represents as land; but at any rate my

faith in the Pilot is so far stronger than yours, inasmuch as I trust his word, and do not pretend to see. My faith is shown in my acquiescing in confessed and contented ignorance.

Listen not then, my christian friends, to any "developments" of Gospel-doctrine, whether from high-church or low-church schools, which profess to explain what the christian Scriptures have left in obscurity. Those who resolve to reject, and refuse to believe, whatever they cannot explain and reconcile to the conjectures of their own reason; and those again who resolve thus to explain all the doctrines they do believe, —both of these,—opposite as they appear, —agree in destroying faith, as a christian virtue; for there can be no trial of faith in believing that, and that only, which we clearly understand, or suppose ourselves to understand; and in doing something the reason of which is evident to our own minds.

Distrust then all those, however high may be their pretensions to pre-eminent faith, who profess to go beyond the inspired Writers, and to expound clearly what these

have passed over in silence, or left in obscurity.

Seek indeed earnestly to learn all that God *has* taught us through his inspired servants; but seek to know no more. Strive to be learned in what God has revealed, and to remain humbly and contentedly ignorant of what He has left unrevealed. Endeavour to understand as much—and be content to understand *only* as much—of the divine counsels, as the Scriptures unfold to us. "But seek not thou to understand" (as is expressed in the beautiful language of a poet*)—

But seek not thou to understand
The deep and curious lore
With which full many a reckless hand
Has gloss'd these pages o'er.

Pray for what passes human skill,
The power God's Will to do:
Read thou, that thou may'st *do* his Will,
And thou shalt know it too.

And what, if much be still unknown;
Thy Lord shall teach thee that,
When thou shalt stand before his throne,
Or sit as Mary sat.

---

* Bishop Hinds.

Wait till He shall, Himself, disclose
Things now beyond thy reach;
But listen not, my child, to those
Who the Lord's secrets teach:

Who teach thee more than He has taught;
Tell more than He revealed;
Preach tidings which He never brought,
And read what He left sealed.

THE END.

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